

지갑송 퓨전 판타지 장편소설

# 레벨업하는 몬스터 1

# **A Monster Who Levels Up**

– 레벨업하는 몬스터 –

**- Part 3 -**

**-Author-**

**Jee Gab Song**

**[ Fantasy-Books ]**

# CHAPTER 61

## THE VICIOUS CYCLE (1)

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Reversing of the public sentiment was a success. Joo Ji-Hyuk ended up earning the nickname of the 'Griffin Knight', and Muffin even performed an interview with a reporter.

The killer smile of Muffin that spread out to all social media in real time was adorable enough to give people heart attacks and that's how she temporarily got to 'own' the Internet.

But quite strangely, only Jo Hahn-Sung gritted his teeth and called Muffin the Satan Reincarnate or some such, but Sae-Jin didn't pay too much mind to it.

As Muffin became famous, inquiries from Knights and Knights Orders throughout the world rushed in like tsunami waves via the Society's home page.

A Chinese Knights Order even suggested that Sae-Jin tame the Monsters with the eggs they would bring in for a cool fee of post-tax \$180 million.

Well, it seemed like the romantic ideals of Knights were the same regardless of where they were from.

Plus, riding on a Griffin wasn't just a simple romantic dream for Knights, either. After all, imagine a Knight astride a Griffin, tearing through the sky – wasn't that just the coolest sight ever? In other words, it was a wonderful marketing opportunity, right there.

Whatever the case may have been, thanks to this thing with the Griffin, Kim Sae-Jin's name had begun to spread around the world for real – from a humble, regular citizen of a small country, to the leader of the Society that had become the focus of the world.

As an evidence of his fame, the number of his SNS followers had blitzed past 1 million and was closing in on the 2 million mark quite rapidly. And just last week, the Society's class saw another advancement, this time to C+... In other words, things have gotten pretty damn nice for Sae-Jin lately.

“...I also want to ride one.”

Currently, inside the Chairman's office located in The Monster's building. There was yet another Knight present here who wanted her own Griffin.

Yu Sae-Jung was 'gently' staring at Sae-Jin's face as he was doing some paperwork while hunched over his desk. Her large and sparkling eyes contained an earnest desire within.

“I'm sorry, but you can't. You're still a low Mid Tier. Didn't you hear what Joo Ji-Hyuk said before?”

“Come on, Oppa. A Knight's Tier isn't the true reflection of her abilities, you know? I mean, it's like, since the rank advancement exams take place only twice a year, sometimes people rank up slower than compared to their capabilities. Me, I can do this no problem, you know?!”

She 'came to work' to the Society's HQ instead of her own Dawn Order. Apparently, her superiors easily granted her the permission when she said she'd be coming here to ride on a Griffin.

“Not going to happen.”

“...Fuu.”

But Sae-Jin firmly refused her, causing her cheeks to puff up in annoyance and she started pounding on the desk with her palm.

“Everyday, you're always favouring Knight Ji-Hyuk only... Oppa, you into guys?”

“What the?! No, I'm not.”

“Then why do you hate me so much?!”

After spitting out her words, she then observed changes in Sae-Jin's mood for a bit. However, he was still 'toiling' away with his paperwork.

“...Pretending to work hard only in situations like this...”

Usually, he'd dump all the work to his subordinates, anyways.

Still pouting, Yu Sae-Jung tenaciously stuck around Sae-Jin's office.

The patience, obsession, and the tenacity possessed by the precious daughter of the Chaebol household was not to be underestimated. 10 minutes, 20 minutes, and then 30 minutes... Time flowed quickly, but all she did was simply stare at Sae-Jin without giving up.

Of course, as far as time was concerned, Sae-Jin would always be in a disadvantage; before he knew it, his legs were trembling ever so slightly.

"Alright, then, let's do it this way."

In the end, Sae-Jin had to concede first. When he got up from his seat while putting on a jacket, those excessively sparkling lights came back in full force in her eyes.

"Bring me a Griffin egg."

"Eh?"

The documents he was pouring over just now was actually information regarding Griffin eggs. In the past, records showed that five to six eggs appeared on auctions throughout the year, but nowadays, not one have, so far. And the financial department head Yu Dohng also mentioned that even if one did appear, it should commence a sky-high price anyways.

So, he was thinking that, even if it was the might of the Dawn, finding one would take some time, and Yu Sae-Jung would no doubt have become a Mid Tier by then.

"Then I'll make sure you can ride on one. Cool?"

He quickly added these words and then lightly patted Yu Sae-Jung's head once before hurrying outside.

"I've got things to take care of, so I'll get going first."

Sae-Jin left like that. And with a blank face, Yu Sae-Jung's eyes chased after his back, visible through the open gap of the doors.

"...Whew-oo..."



Then suddenly, she let out a long sigh. Riding on a Griffin – certainly, that would be nice. But that was only a part of the reason why she was here.

‘I wanted to ask him out for lunch...’

Was he really too dense to notice, or did he really not like her that much? While hiding a disappointed and melancholic heart, she trudged towards the restaurant she had made a reservation with.



It was late at night.

A Goblin that was lying on a bed tossing and turning, abruptly opened his eyes. From his two bloodshot eyes, a strange aura was oozing out.

“Fuu...”

Scanning the surroundings for a moment or two, the Goblin let out a long sigh before suddenly morphing into a human being.

“...It’s happening again.”

Kim Sae-Jin dazedly muttered out. The clock said 2:30 AM.

Roughly a month after acquiring the Orc Great Warrior Form, he was currently suffering from various negative side effects.

First of all, it became impossible to enjoy a relaxing night’s sleep anymore. The vitality of the Orc residing within him did not permit things it did not agree with, such as lying down for more than three hours straight.

This much was fine. With his body so sturdy and strong, there would be more than enough stamina for the whole day even with minimal amount of sleep.

The real big problem was the explosive increase of his base instincts and desires, such as gluttony and lust, as well as his aggressive tendencies for violence and confrontation.

Against the strong, he’d give his everything in a challenge, but against the weak, a

deserved domination and trampling. Craving to be the true victor, but the defeated would be ruthlessly humiliated and stepped on.

Now that he threw away the identity of the Werewolf, Orc's basic instincts and racial tendencies were spreading all over him.

"...Damn it."

Sae-Jin held his head in distress.

Just what kind of a vicious cycle was this? He chased so hard after his evolution in order to overcome the threat of losing his ego; but now, he simply had no avenue to soothe his powerfully surging instincts.

While gazing at the cold white light of the full moon permeating through the curtains, he slowly got up from his bed. There would be no change whatsoever by sitting on his a\*s doing nothing, after all.

Whatever the case may be, he just had to work harder.



The conditions of his evolutions couldn't simply be satisfied by hunting Monsters. That was why, if at all possible, he had to try out everything. For now, there was no other way but to try out any old random things.

"...Heuk... Heu, euuuk..."

Sae-Jin was thinking, would he be able to evolve somehow, if he killed the Knight crawling in front of him? No, that was too much, so maybe he should just break a leg or two, instead...

'As long as I don't kill...'

He could assist the victim with the best potion brewed by the Goblin Alchemist.

He then walked in heavy steps towards the female Knight and grabbed her by her slender waist. The huge hand of the Werewolf was enough to pick her up off the ground.

“Let... let go, let me go...”

When he saw the terror-stricken face of the female Knight, from deep inside of him a powerful sense of enjoyment bubbled up to the front. So, the Wolf’s long tongue reached out and licked her face.

“Kkyahk!!”

Her terrified screams stabbed into his ears. It sure was a loud sound for the Wolf with a very sensitive hearing ability, and fortunately, Sae-Jin could recover some of his humanity from that scream.

“Ah...”

He turned his gaze towards the sky. The dawn’s sky with the full moon high up was dyed in the deep shades of navy blue.

That was it, the full moon. No doubt, the cause for this crisis was the Werewolf’s instincts enhanced by the full moon getting all tangled up with the Orc’s desires.

*“\*SFX for a child-like sobbing\*”*

It was then, the Knight captured within his hand began crying like a child.

Only then did Sae-Jin check who she was while tilting his head.

And she was someone he had been somewhat acquainted with before, the girl who lost to Yu Sae-Jung at the Knights Duel, Jung Eun-Ji.

Why was the female Knight famous even in the entertainment industry out hunting during these dangerous hours?

“...Khrrrng.”

From the jaws of the Wolf, a strange and murky, low frequency growl came out. Taking this as a sign of the creature attacking her, Jung Eun-Ji squeezed her eyes shut. But what happened next was quite confusing to her, to say the least.

‘Come back when you get stronger.’



<<<<

He freed her while carrying a mischievous grin. Of course, to her eyes it was one of the most terrifying expressions she'd ever seen.

*\*SFX for thudding footsteps\**

And then, walking with heavy steps, he headed off elsewhere.

Her face all messed up with snot and tears, Jung Eun-Ji sank to the ground powerlessly and continued to stare at the back of the departing Werewolf silently.



Sae-Jin continued to walk through the forest for a while longer after that, before sensing a strange energy. Even from this great distance, he could sense that nearly imperceptible evil energy with black and crimson colours blending together to give off a seriously bad vibe.

As if he was a moth drawn by the light, he approached it and found a stone that seemingly looked as innocuous as it could get. There was no need for him to wonder what this thing was for, as...

[A Summoning Rock] [An Installation-Type Portal] [Remaining number of usages: 20/24]

- A stone made by an unknown individual for summoning purposes. 24 times a day, Monsters within its effective area will be transferred to the specified area.
- It'll break once the number of usages run out.

...As he possessed a leveled-up Passive that allowed him to take a peek at the information of things other than weapons.

Sae-Jin immediately figured it out the moment he read the alert window.

This was the culprit of all those Monster incidents happening throughout the country until now. No, the real culprit was *something* else. The alert window said this thing

was made by an unknown individual, after all.

‘But what an unexpected harvest.’

For now, Sae-Jin sliced apart this Summoning Rock and stopped its operation.



*– It is now known that Knight Jung Eun-Ji is complaining about the mental trauma suffered at the hands of the Werewolf while being treated in the private medical facility.....*

Two days later, after being seen as a big scoop, the stories related to Jung Eun-Ji exploded out into the open.

Sae-Jin definitely didn’t give her any external wounds. The only thing he did was to break her weapon, that was all.

But seeing all that exaggerated reactions coming from the news, the various publications and even from the netizens, clearly the identity of the victim played the biggest role of all, it seemed.

*– Although experts concur that this Werewolf has been active within the Monster field for quite some time, they are suspecting that there might be some type of connection between it and the Monster-related attacks that have been occurring frequently.*

*\*SFX for papers rustling\**

As Sae-Jin was paying attention to the news broadcast on the television, out of the blue, he could hear the sound of something being written inside the desk’s drawer.

That was an indication of someone writing on the communication notebook. So, he pulled the book out from the drawer.

[It is simply too difficult to believe you when you claim to have seen through the scheme and the culprit behind the current incidents. If you can prove this, then we’re more than willing to follow through on all of your demands.]

It was a message from the Special Investigation Division after a long time had passed by.

The truth of these incidents... As he did find something two days ago by sheer good timing, he picked up his pen with certain amount of confidence.

[Haven't you ever wondered why the number of Monsters within the Monster field had decreased? Also, have you heard of an item called "Summoning Rock" before? I already have figured out everything. But unless you prepare a suitable reward, I refuse to reply further after this.]

In all honesty, it wasn't because he was refusing to – he couldn't, even if he wanted to. But still, he passed on everything he knew this way. He found negotiating like this when many innocent people were suffering out there rather uncomfortable after all.

And when he realised this uncomfortable feeling within his mind, he somehow felt happy as well, knowing that it was the evidence of him not being assimilated to either the Orc or the Wolf Form.

*\*SFX for papers rustling\**

Even though replies were hastily being written after his own words. Sae-Jin coolly closed the notebook.



June 21st.

The longest day in the year, and the true beginning of the Summer.

[The Society that's expanding internationally, The Monster; over 300 Knights Orders gather for the demonstration of the Athany 2.0...] [The Orc's 'Whip Sword', the revolutionary weapon that can bend its blade like a whip when Mana is injected – certified as a 5th rank Branded Goods. The reasons why the Orc's work isn't from luck or coincidence:...] [The Goblin Alchemist produces a high grade potion once more; the Yoseon Alchemy House is now being referred to as the Goblin House.]

"Our Society is doing really well right now, isn't it? No wait, isn't it Oppa who's doing

really well?”

After finishing up with her work, Yu Sae-Jung showed up in Sae-Jin’s office just like before. This time, he was reading a newspaper; he chuckled slightly and got up to leave.

“Don’t you have to go to school?”

“Well, no, I’m admitted to a university already. Meaning, it’s the same thing as me being an official adult – no, I am an adult now. I even got the driving licence, too!!”

Yu Sae-Jung seemed to be in an especially good mood. Today was actually the day she was going to have lunch with him. She even wore a sleek, fancy outfit and a pair of high heels for the occasion.

“Is that so? Well then, shall we get going?”

While speaking, Kim Sae-Jin smoothly wrapped his arm around her shoulders. At this subtle contact, Yu Sae-Jung was stunned slightly. But she could only swallow down her saliva. Without saying much, she naturally followed his lead.

“So, where would you like to go?”

“Mm? Oh, right. I made reservations, but it’s fine to go where Oppa wishes to go.”

“No, it’s alright. Let’s go to the reserved place.”

## CHAPTER 62

### THE VICIOUS CYCLE (2)

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With Kim Sae-Jin riding shotgun, Yu Sae-Jung drove the car by herself to the restaurant located within the city limits of Gangwon Province. *(TL: The name of the city isn't specified in the raw.)*

She drove quickly for 10 minutes, before arriving at their destination.

"We're here."

"Oh. You're pretty good at driving."

Her skills behind the wheel, whether it was driving or parking, was so perfect it made him exclaim out in admiration. Honestly speaking, at first, he got so nervous, he had to pull the seat belt as tightly as possible...

"Obviously. I'm good at everything, you know."

What she said could've been seen as a jinx, but he couldn't help but find her brightly-smiling face simply endearing.

"Eu-ssya."

She got off the car first, then hurriedly walked over to the passenger side and opened the door for him. Sae-Jin chuckled slightly as he exited the car, thinking, *isn't a man supposed to do that for a lady instead?*

And so, the two of them approached the restaurant's entrance.

Yu Sae-Jung continuously searched for the right opportunity to link their arms together, but simply couldn't work up the courage to go for it.

And so, her body continued to flinch this way and that while still searching for that right timing – but, before that could happen, the Maître D' had already approached them. Feeling genuinely bummed out, she began to resent the waiter in her mind.

“Have you made reservations?”

“Yes, yesterday. Under ‘Yu Sae-Jung’, for two.”

The restaurant she had made reservations with, the “Dinner In Angel”, was so famous for its wonderful flavour and classy atmosphere, it operated on the reservation basis only. As far as Sae-Jin knew, a regular Joe would have to make a reservation a month in advance for his spot – that’s how famous it was.

“Of course. Please follow me.”

Sae-Jin and Yu Sae-Jung followed the Maître D’s guidance and entered the restaurant’s interior.

The melody of a classical music number gently floated in the air; one could tell that the décor was very expensive, even at a casual glance. And the patrons here were all someone Sae-Jin thought he might recognize from somewhere.

His facial expression became slightly stunned as he discovered celebrities he saw often in TV shows, as well as famous Knights and Wizards here.

“This is your reserved table.”

The place they were guided to – the table Yu Sae-Jung had reserved – was located in the best spot next to the windows where one could see the panoramic view of the cityscape below.

Kim Sae-Jin still felt out of place in such a luxurious restaurant, but as expected of a gold spoon, Yu Sae-Jung was just fine. She placed her order in a relaxed manner and then shifted her gaze towards Sae-Jin, who was still scanning the other diners around them.

“It’s going to taste great.”

As she spoke, a brilliant smile was spreading on her face.

“I think so, too.”

“Hehe. Right?”



Shortly after, their food arrived. Their meal started off with soup, then moved onto tiny little steaks, followed by slightly bigger steaks, etc, etc.

They chatted away while savouring the food.

Even though Sae-Jin spoke about things that just randomly popped into his head, the big smile on Yu Sae-Jung's face showed no sign of disappearing. At one point, she even laughed out too loudly and drew in the attention of the surroundings.

And so, over 40 minutes had gone past; the meal came to an end just as Sae-Jin was beginning to feel nervous about the time idling away.

"Let's get going."

He got up from his seat first. Yu Sae-Jung also got up, but her expression was somewhat regretful at the same time. Right away, Sae-Jin quickly ran towards the counter. He was trying to pay for the meal, but unfortunately for him, there was no need to do that in the first place.

"This restaurant is owned by the Dawn Corporation, and as such, Miss Yu Sae-Jung and her fellow patron is exempt from paying." (Waiter)

"...Oh. Is that right?"

As Sae-Jin blankly nodded his head, a sonorous voice could be heard from his back.

"Did you hear that? Maybe Oppa got too used to it and keeps on forgetting it, but I am that kind of a woman, you know~."

She puffed her chest out and tried to sound imposing and all.

It was then, the expression of the waiter behind the counter became a little strange. Obviously, it was not her first time dining in this restaurant. She had brought along other Knights from the Dawn Order, saying they were her colleagues and stuff like that.

But her expressions now and back then were completely on the opposite side of the spectrum. It was enough to make the waiter wonder if she was the same person or not.

She did not smile at all back then, ditto for the coy facial expression.

Her rigid lips were only used for consuming her food, and it was quite obvious from her expressions just how much she wanted to go home as soon as possible.

‘... Is she flirting with him?’

That notion sounded totally nonsensical. Just what would make Yu Sae-Jung flirt like that with another person?

Of course, the waiter knew the guy next to her as he’d heard and saw him before.

Kim Sae-Jin.

Although he hadn’t yet made an official appearance on TV, but still, he was a man the attentions of the public was focused on, as evidenced by his name being mentioned at least once every day in every television programme there was, even including those variety shows.

‘But they do look good together.’

The waiter silently stared at the departing backs of Sae-Jin and Yu Sae-Jung while feeling a sense of emptiness.

“Oppa, um, since there’s some time left, so... how about we catch a movie?”

As they stepped out of the restaurant, Yu Sae-Jung carefully asked him.

“Uh? Oh... That... I, uh, I’m not really into movies.”

He replied while scratching the back of his neck. Movies... Well, he never really had any luck with such leisure activities before but ever since his Trait awakened, it had become totally impossible now.

“Ah, if that’s the case, then what about those machines where you win plush toys? There are loads of them around here.”

She walked alongside him and tried to lead him towards the ‘next’ thing. She really didn’t want to end today’s meeting with only a single lunch together.

However, his situation didn't permit that.

"Even that is, still..."

"T, then, why don't we go to a cafe and just talk? You see, after today, we won't be able to see each other for a few weeks... You heard, right? The order for the emergency stand-by."

Anxiety could be heard in Yu Sae-Jung's voice. But there was nothing he could do. After sighing out deeply, he patted her head and spoke.

"I'm sorry. Let's just head home for today."

"..."

Sae-Jung's gaze remained directed to the floor without saying a single word for a while.

But that didn't last for long. As if nothing had happened, she smiled brightly and replied to him in a lively manner.

"Yeah, well. I guess it can't be helped. By the way, Oppa, you know you missed a big chance today, right?"

She quickly walked towards the car and entered it – but Sae-Jin stood there momentarily after sensing her voice tremble.

He was left utterly frustrated and bitter. The meaning behind the time limit for his Human Form was that he wouldn't be able to develop a deep relationship with another person. He wasn't sure since when Yu Sae-Jung developed such feelings for him, but...

"What are you doing? I'll drive you back to your house."

She lowered the driver's side window and shouted at him. He trudged to the passenger side and entered the car. Right away, the engine roared into life, and she expertly manoeuvred out of the parking lot.

"...Did you enjoy the food?"

Sae-Jung tried to engage in small talk as if everything was fine, but it was plain to see

that she was not okay while sitting behind the wheel. He felt so apologetic towards her, seeing her rigid face with a forced smile on it.



After that day, Sae-Jin immersed himself even deeper in his evolution.

Until the night fell, he really tried pretty much all sorts of things while utilising the Wolf Form, and even resorting to the Forms of the Goblin and Athany.

However, while his evolution seemed so far away still, an official decree for his subjugation was issued. It was called – [The subjugation order for the black-coloured Werewolf found between the low Mid and upper Mid Tier hunting grounds.]

The problem came from the fact that, while he still didn't kill anyone just like when he was the Demon Orc, his much stronger bestial tendencies ended up causing various psychological issues to his victims.

<<<<

His Skill 'Predator' was active during all Forms but since it was acquired after he became the Werewolf, so naturally, its effects were the strongest when he was in the Wolf Form. On top of that, there were times when he couldn't properly control his instincts at all...

Jung Eun-Ji, who had suffered the hardest, was still confined to the hospital room and besides her, twenty more Knights were suffering from lighter psychological traumas, which then precipitated the government and the Knights Orders placing a bounty on his head and issue that subjugation decree.

And that's how, the fame of the Werewolf, once referred to as the Guardian of the Monster field, had been replaced by infamy.

*\*SFX for claws tearing through stuff\**

The lightning-fast claws of the Wolf tore through a Knight's armour. A shrill scream reverberated throughout the mountain side.

Today's opponent was a four-men hunting party comprised of Mid Tier Knights from the Raven Order.

As if the members of this team had worked together for long time, their cooperation, individual stamina management, as well as their abilities left nothing to be desired.

But the reality was, there was just too wide a gap of strength between them and the Werewolf, since there were five Branded Goods-level items stored in him via Spiritualisation, currently level B-.

[Stealth, Level C] [Improved Striking Power, Level B] [Increased Intelligence, Level C] [Material Destruction, Level C] [Light Refraction, Level B]

The most significant bit was the last one, 'Light Refraction'. In a close-quarter battle involving bladed weapons, the one of the most important part was correctly judging the distance between oneself and the enemy. But this 'Light Refraction' made the concept of correct distance pretty much irrelevant.

The claws definitely aimed towards the lower torso, but the resulting terrible wound appeared on the upper part; or, the claw swung from a distance would twist around quite strangely before arriving right in front of the target's nostrils in the blink of an eye.

On top of this, the Wolf's Claws had leveled up over and over again until they rivaled adamantium in hardness alone. Dealing with each of the slashes from these claws was the same as a brush with death.

"Kkheu... heuk."

And so, these four Knights were swept away by the Wolf's unconventional attacks. To these Knights ranked around Mid Tier or lower, they just didn't have much experience in unpredictable battle situations. Sae-Jin in the Wolf Form was just too tall a wall for them to climb.

Sae-Jin fell into a dilemma while seeing the four heavily bleeding Knights grovelling on the ground.

Did he really need to take a human life, or at least cut off a limb or something, to evolve? If that was the case, then... Then...

"Kkhrnng."

However, he quickly distanced himself from the fallen Knights and ran.

Kim Sae-Jin was a human, not a Monster.

In the case if the condition for his evolution really required him to take a human life, then he'd never accept it. Because, that act alone would push him further away from being 'human'.



Next day.

Sae-Jin, accompanied by Joo Ji-Hyuk, was heading towards a hospital fairly early in the morning.

"You wished to see Miss Jung Eun-Ji? She's not..." (Nurse)

"My name is Joo Ji-Hyuk. Eun-Ji should feel okay around me. I also got the permission from the Order as well, since I'm here to treat her."

The reason was Jung Eun-Ji.

Even if he couldn't help it as the Wolf's instincts had taken over back then, his conscience made him feel responsible after seeing her going through so much for the past month or so. And since his Wolf Form was the cause of her distress, there was a good chance that he also possessed the means to cure her.

"By the way, why Eun-Ji, suddenly...?"

Joo Ji-Hyuk asked carefully as they headed towards one of those single-bed patient rooms.

"Ah, that... I am Miss Eun-Ji's fan, you see. That's why I even brought the Goblin's potion along as well."

Although Jung Eun-Ji was nominally a Knight, she also actively participated in the entertainment industry as well, which meant that she had quite a fan base – so it was not a strange excuse to make.

"Uht, eh? The Goblin, you mean the Goblin Alchemist?"



However, Joo Ji-Hyuk was more interested in the Goblin Alchemist instead of Sae-Jin allegedly being Jung Eun-Ji's fan.

But that was par for the course, really. Since the Goblin Alchemist was being seen as some sort of religion in the world of potion making by the so-called 'mud spoon' Knights as well as regular citizens going through tough financial situations.

It was a well known fact that making recovery potions graded upper Mid or High was far more profitable. But disregarding that, he was busy making low Mid grade potions for sale at a low price. Even more, he maintained the rule of one potion per person when selling them.

And so, the Goblin was currently being praised that bordered on reverence as the ideal example of 'Noblesse Oblige'.

Of course, the reality was slightly different.

The low Mid grade potions he 'brewed' wasn't even a proper potion to begin with. It was actually saliva from the Athany Form. The nature of the moisture within the Athany Form was changed to mimic potions and then was discharged – in other words, it was his spit.

As he could produce over 100 litres of spit a day quite easily, he couldn't in good conscience sell that with a high price tag, so that was the reason for the low cost. And he only set the rule of one potion per person because he didn't like those people that acted like scalpers and resold his wares.

"Yes, it is that alchemist."

*Tting~*

While he spoke, the elevator had arrived at the top floor already.

## CHAPTER 63

### THE VICIOUS CYCLE (3)

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Jung Eun-Ji's state was unexpectedly serious. Her face was haggard and the complexion, pale. And there were deep, dark circles below her eyes. As if she was lost within the confines of fear, her body continued to tremble, and she was even scared of making eye contacts.

"...Whew."

Joo Ji-Hyuk did his very best to converse with her but it proved to be difficult in the end. When he shook his head as if to indicate that he was about to give up, Kim Sae-Jin let out a bitter sigh.

"Mister Ji-Hyuk. Can you step outside for a second, please?"

"Eh? Oh... Of course."

Joo Ji-Hyuk left the hospital room without suspecting a thing. Sae-Jin stared at Jung Eun-Ji for a bit longer, before activating the Eyes of the Wolf.

As he thought, he could see some kind of an aura.

The deep blackish-red 'energy' oozing out of every pore in her – the intense hue and the concentration of it seemed to show how severe her condition was.

First, he brought out a potion with the effects of a sedative. Obviously, this would not cure her, but it should help her get some much needed peaceful sleep. He was planning to treat her while she slept.

"Miss Eun-Ji?"

She trembled even more when he suddenly called out her name. Her head slowly raised up.

"Please take this."

When comparing the odour from the Wolf Form and his Human Form, the former was thicker and stronger so one would be hard pressed to think they were from the same source. But there was some similarity there still.

She couldn't even dare to refuse him, and with quaking hands, received the potion.

"Drink it."

Jung Eun-Ji wordlessly drank it.

And precisely one minute later, she passed out on the bed.

After confirming that she was out cold for good, he extended his claws. Then, he slashed lightly at the bad 'energy' rising up from her body. And when he did that, the gently dancing aura began to coagulate around his claws as if it had finally found its owner.

"...What the?"

He was slightly taken back at this unexpected development. He was thinking that aura would be sliced apart just like before, so why...

However, the contents of the alert window rising up were even more absurd in nature.

[The Skill 'Dark Energy Link' has been generated.] [Dark Energy Link]

- Obedience through terror and fear.

- Whenever the 'ruler' wants, he can cause the emotions of terror and fear in the 'ruled subjects'.

- The 'ruled subjects' will feel terror and fear when trying to refuse the 'ruler's' orders, requests and/or suggestions. However, the 'ruled subjects' will not be aware of the effects of the Link.

- The 'ruler' can sever the Link at any time. However, if he wishes to reconnect the Link, he must go through the same process as before.

[After creating the Link with 17 humans and then by maintaining them successfully, the host will evolve into 'Lycanthrope']

He ended up receiving the clues to becoming a Lycanthrope quite unexpectedly.

He dazedly studied the alert window. Definitely, that dark and red energy coming off her had vanished. But seeing those words written on the alert window... Heck, wasn't this pretty similar to a master and slave relationship?!

*"\*Soft moaning\*"*

Jung Eun-Ji suddenly shifted her body slightly. Her frowning face had already reverted back into the relaxed, emotionless one, and her body wasn't trembling anymore. Even her breathing had become calm, resembling that of a young sleeping child.

Whatever the case may have been, it was true that his 'treatment' was complete. So, he hurriedly escaped from the hospital room.

Joo Ji-Hyuk was leaning against the wall while waiting for him. When he approached, Sae-Jin spat out quickly and headed towards the elevator.

"I think she'll be fine from now on. But Mister Ji-Hyuk, if and when she wakes up and starts saying strange things, please, you must call me first before anyone else."

"Eh?"

"...Please, I'm begging you here!!"

Joo Ji-Hyuk dumbfoundedly stared at Sae-Jin's back before entering Eun-Ji's room while scratching the back of his neck.

And around three hours later, the call from Joo Ji-Hyuk did indeed come.

The contents were simple enough. Jung Eun-Ji had recovered completely from the trauma after ingesting that potion, so she had requested him to send her thanks to Sae-Jin.

'... Is this that thing about the subject not being aware of the skill's effects?'

Sae-Jin scratched his cheek slightly while looking at his SNS profile. Jung Eun-Ji had uploaded a photo of her brightly smiling face and a lengthy message there.

[The Monster Chairman #KimSaeJin came to visit me personally. With a potion brewed by #GoblinAlchemist. I'm recovered now thanks to this potion... But he left before I woke up, and I have no other way of showing how grateful I am other than this one. The idiot Knight #JooJiHyuk said that #KimSaeJin is a fan of mine... Please call me anytime!]

‘What a relief.’

He pressed the ‘Like’ button to show that he had received her message while not giving the matter too much thought.

And about one hour later – news articles regarding the supposed relationship between Sae-Jin and Jung Eun-Ji exploded out into the Internet, and Yu Sae-Jung – whom he thought wouldn't call him for the next few weeks – phoned him first while gritting her teeth like crazy.

On this day, Sae-Jin finally understood what it was like to lead the life of a celebrity.

There were no real benefits of getting famous; instead, there was only the pretty useless handicap of having one's life become more complicated.



Afterwards, Sae-Jin went around doing slightly cowardly things.

He assumed the Werewolf form, and attacked Knights ranked lower than low Mid Tier, causing them to suffer psychological shocks. Knights with ranks higher than low Mid Tier possessed stronger mental resistance and thus forming a Link with them was not possible.

And he'd go and see them under the pretext of helping them, all the while scheming to form the Link, which would then take him one step closer to his evolution.

During this process, the fame of both Sae-Jin and the Goblin Alchemist rose up higher and higher, while the infamy of the Werewolf also soared high enough to pierce the heavens.

[The assault on Knights and Hunters by the Werewolf occurs once more today.]  
[The thug of the Monster field; how long do we need to witness this?] [The ineptitude of the Knights who can't even deal with a single Monster is finally revealed for all to see.]

Even the media took issues with the Werewolf, calling it cowardly but intelligent Monster that avoided the strong while terrorising the weaklings.

Before long, the Werewolf became the 'face' of evil, and Knights ranked upper Mid and High Tier began moving to subjugate it.

Thanks to this development, Sae-Jin unfortunately had to stop after creating Links with only ten people.

And so, time continued to flow – and now, it was 13th of August.

On this sweltering Summer day heat, the planned product demonstration of The Monster opened up on an auditorium in Gangwon Province.

The central aim for this event was to advertise the Athany doll version 2.0, which now came with effects improved enough to replace a Mana Spring. Over three thousand Knights and reporters from all over the globe showed up for this demonstration.

Since this number exceeded the capacity of the auditorium, the remaining five hundred or so people had to view the event through the giant monitor set up outside the venue itself.

The emcee for the event was Jo Hahn-Sung but the role of introducing the Athany doll 2.0 was entrusted to Kim Sae-Jin.

Initially, he was really worried – but it unexpectedly ended without him getting jittery. Maybe, it was an obvious result since all he had to do was to step up for less than ten minutes and the things he had to say wasn't a lot either.

He simply walked up to the stage while holding a doll even he found absolutely cute, and then...

“Well, first of all. All the Knights and Wizards present here, please sense the Mana coming off this doll of Athany.”



After speaking up to here, he waited until the Knights and Wizards become stunned by the vividly flowing currents of Mana and then he ‘suggested’ the estimated value of the doll that even a layman could understand.

With that over and done with, the rest was left up to the audience members. The Knights spat out exaggerated words of admiration and praise in honest shock, while Wizards’ faces carried deep frowns of jealousy – and the fingers of the reporters pounded on their notebooks as if to break them into pieces or something.

And into this powder keg, he threw in one more spark of fire.

“In three months’ time, we are planning to release another invention besides the Athany doll to the market – a special item that contains the essence of The Monster. Please look forward to it.”

The auditorium descended into a chaotic arena of fervor as he quickly stepped into the backstage.

“Was there really a need to do a live broadcast like this...? Maybe I should reprimand the marketing department later on.”

Watching the footage coming out of the TV, an embarrassed smile spread on Sae-Jin’s face.

“Eh? No, I don’t think you have to do something like that. Maybe because your height has grown taller, you looked really good up on the stage, you know? I mean, really, really cool. If I was a bit younger, I’d have fallen for you already~”

While taking a cute little bite at an apple, Hazeline spoke.

Today, she had come to see Sae-Jin about a problem regarding debt. However, this time she was here as the lendee, not a lender. In other words, she came to borrow some money for the Alchemy House expansion plan.

The amount was nearly \$4.5 million US, but since Sae-Jin owed her for her generous support back then, he didn’t even hesitate in lending this money. That was probably why she was flirting (?) with him like this with a huge smile on her face.

“Haha... Is that right?”

“Of course~ Ah, right. By the way, one Athany doll 2.0 should go for at least around \$50 million so, doesn’t that mean Mister Sae-Jin is loaded now?”

Her voice was filled to the brim with envy.

“Ahaha... Actually, I don’t have much in my bank account. You see, I’m busy purchasing land right now.”

“Land? But why?”

“Well. The financial and the planning departments gave me an advice. By buying up the land between the Society’s building and the Yoseon Alchemy House, it would aid in the Society’s expansion in the future.”

Hazeline dazedly calculated the distance between here and her Alchemy House – then her jaws dropped to the floor while carrying a shocked expression.

“From here to there?! Wouldn’t that cost a fortune? Even if the land price in Gangwon Province has hit rock bottom because of all the Monster incidents...”

“I’ve already acquired about the half of the area. The pricing on the Orc’s weapons has gone up by a lot, you see.”

<<<<

Hazeline blankly gazed at him, before swallowing her saliva and did a fake cough. And then, she carefully opened her mouth.

“Ah~ The economy is in the doldrums lately. Maybe I should increase the rent~~? Mister S, Sa, Sae-Jin, what do you think?”

It was a well-known fact that the building the Orc’s Forge was located in belonged to Hazeline.

Her appearance in that moment was unbelievably cute quite unlike her real age of 30-ish; and it was enough to momentarily rouse the instinctive lust in him.

“...Ah, hahaha...”

He suppressed his rising instincts to the best of his abilities and awkwardly laughed out.



His quest to evolve into a Lycanthrope had to come to a halt for now, but Sae-Jin didn't become lazy at all.

This time, he worked hard to advance the 'Human' Form, instead.

He was able to somehow squeeze 30 minutes out of the time he could stay in Human Form and during this half hour, he focused on training and exercising. And then, went on Monster hunts as a human. Before long, he was able to grasp the title of the 'youngest ever High Tier Hunter' in the history.

"Are you referring to partnering up with a Knights Order?"

"That's correct. I'm pretty sure there will be plenty of Orders who wish to participate."

Regrettably, training alone had its limits. So, he called for Jo Hahn-Sung to request a cooperative hunting with a willing Knights Order.

"...Yes. Probably, it'll end up with the Order we choose. But, wouldn't it be better if the Chairman contacts the Dawn directly...?"

Right away, Sae-Jin's sharp eyes landed on Hahn-Sung. Even though the number of people working under him was the highest among all the departments at 13, from some time ago, it felt like he was trying to shuck his responsibilities, somehow...

"No, no it's not like that. I will send the relevant documents right away!!"

Jo Hahn-Sung quickly saw through the meaning of his gaze and bent his back in 90 degree angle.

"Thank you. Well... oh, right. Mister Hahn-Sung, Are you aware that the space for our HQ is continuously expanding?"

"Yes, of course."

"I am planning to construct more buildings on the area adjacent to this one. The goal

is to let each department occupy at least one whole building by themselves. The plan is to also build break rooms and night duty rooms where one can rest, so please spread the word to other employees as well.”

Then, Hahn-Sung’s eyes gleamed hopefully.

“If, if that’s the case, then, the Satan, no I mean, Muffin will be...?”

“Obviously, the marketing department will continue to look after her. Since she’s a fussy girl, it wouldn’t be too good to change the current caretaker, after all.”

“...Ah...”

Jo Hahn-Sung’s expression became of someone who had lost his country.

“But, but, I’m not a caretaker...”

*...I’m not, and it’s definitely more correct to call me a slave instead...*

“Pardon?” (Sae-Jin)

Unfortunately, Hahn-Sung could not continue with his words. He simply swallowed back the rising sighs and just shook his head.



At the same time, Kim Yu-Rin received a summon from the Raven Order’s Master in a long, long while.

Kim Hyun-Seok – not only the Order Master of the Raven, but also selected as 2nd seat in the list of Knights around the world; otherwise known as the Best Highest Tier Knight in the Republic of Korea.

...And also, Kim Yu-Rin’s father.

He once said that the relationship between a parent and a child was not much different to that of a boss and a subordinate; when Kim Yu-Rin was first admitted to the Raven Order, in other words, when she was just a high school freshman, he forcefully kicked her out of the house, regardless of how much she cried and begged him not to.

And then, for the past 10 years, Kim Hyun-Seok treated his own flesh and blood poorer than he'd a stranger when it came to official matters. And so, it had been nearly four years since her last visit to the Order Master's office.

"...Pardon? A diplomatic war?" (Kim Yu-Rin)

"Correct. Now that the Athany doll's effects have been proven without a shred of doubt, and also it's possible for the international Knights Orders to buy one, the number of them lobbying the government has increased by far too much."

The reason Kim Hyun-Seok had summoned his daughter was, of course, to discuss the matters of the Order.

Currently, the top Knights Orders around the world were engaging in a weaponless war – all for the Athany doll 2.0.

Seen as better than an A-level Mana Spring due to the effects 'Mana recovery' and 'stamina recovery' added simultaneously onto the doll, it now became a core issue directly related to the status of Knights Orders in general.

On top of this, this situation now was different to when the competition only occurred between the local Orders. If another country took it away, then that would damage the prestige of the nation itself.

"And... and so?" (Kim Yu-Rin)

"I heard that you're on friendly terms with the Society's Chairman."

Kim Yu-Rin's body trembled slightly.

"...That... that was..."

"Was it a lie?"

"N, no, it was not! I am friendly with him. We even spoke on the phone yesterday..."

Yu-Rin roughly shook her head. This was the first time her father had summoned her officially and placed complete trust in her. That meant that there was no more suitable person than her for this job, and it also showed how much her father believed in her.

She didn't want to betray his belief in her.

"Is that right? Then I shall leave this matter to you."

"...Please be rest assured, fa... Master."

The word *father* circled around once in her mouth before dissipating altogether.

For a while now, calling Kim Hyun-Seok 'Master' instead of 'father' had become the norm for her.

# CHAPTER 64

## THE DEAD BALL (1)

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From the blood-soaked altar, an eerie aura spread out and descended like a darkest, blackest fog, casting a heavy veil on the surroundings.

A certain ritual-type ceremony was occurring in this accursed place.

The purpose of this ceremony was to take the deepest wishes of the gathered few and to turn that into mental energy which then would cause a physical phenomenon.

“Is everything ready?”

A bewitching voice could be heard from the throne located one level higher than the altar located in the middle. The language used was of unknown origin – not English, not Chinese, nor was it Korean.

But her voice was a clear proof of its owner being the next ruler of all Vampires, judging by the way all nine Vampires stopped their preparations and deeply bowed their heads.

“There is no need. Instead, please inform me of the progress made so far.”

The benevolent voice spread out like a cold wind. One of the nine Vampires present, with his eyes red and a robe covering his entire body, carefully opened his mouth.

“We’re almost done with the preparations. We’ve found the coordinates of our home world following the wisdom of our Lord, and all that’s left to do is to open the portal with the sacrifices and the accumulated Mana Stones, my Queen.”

“...Huhut. Haven’t I told you not to refer to me as a Queen yet? You must stop that immediately.”

Unlike her words, she sounded pretty chuffed, however.

“So, then – where will this portal be opened?”

“There are total of three possible locations. The country we’re currently located in, England; the country where ‘Dretoon’ has chosen as their base, China; and Korea, where the *old man* and *the kid* are currently residing in. However...”

Vampire with the robe showed signs of hesitation and stopped his words there.

“It’s quite alright. Speak.”

“That is... the one with the highest possibility of being the right portal is the one in Korea. It’s probably because there are two Dead Fissures located in the vicinity of such a tiny landmass and so, the probability of *our* portal connecting there is very high...”

The Vampire suddenly stopped talking here. It was because the wavering aura oozing from the ‘Queen’ sitting atop the throne was becoming quite serious.

“My apologies.”

The Vampire who spoke just now quickly began prostrating on the floor. But the ‘Queen’ simply sighed out once, and instead of reprimanding him, she encouraged him to continue.

“No, it is quite alright. This is actually for the better. I would have settled our quarrel with *the kid* sooner or later anyway. Then, let us simply head over to Korea. I trust that you have made the prior preparations already.”

“...Pardon? Ah, yes. O, of course.”

“Then it’s all good. We shall believe in you and leave the rest to your capable hands.”

Only then, the powerful pressure bearing down on the entire altar scattered away like the blowing dust. She was gone. The 9 Vampires present could only breathe out and try to calm their minds.

“It is good that she wasn’t as furious as we feared.”

“That is that, but... besides that, what are we going to do? We haven’t even made a single preparation whatsoever...”

A different Vampire asked in frustration.



“...Keum. Just book out a room in a five star hotel, I’m sure she will enjoy that. Our Queen isn’t too knowledgeable of the outside world anyway.”

“Huh? But what about the other hotel guests, then?”

“Just say they are her attendants or something. There’s a chance she might be happier this way with the increase in the number of servants since she’d never set foot outside the Ancient Frederik Castle, not even once.”

At this nonsensical suggestion, the other eight Vampires looked at this guy with disbelieving eyes.

“Truly, there will not be any problems. After all, does she not hate being in the same space as the poorer bloodlines? There’s simply no way she’ll run into other hotel guests.”

“...But,”

“Enough. Let us stop this discussion here and begin the most important part of our operation.”



A certain afternoon of a Summer day with bright sunlight casting down.

“Heup!!”

Even today, Kim Sae-Jin was diligently hunting in the low Mid Tier hunting ground alone. This was a repeated labour he performed every weekday. Being alone posed no significant problems. With all the Magic Tattoos inscribed on him, as well as the items stored inside with Spiritualisation, he had grown strong enough to defeat a gang of low Mid Tier Monsters by himself.

“Ptooeey!!”

Sae-Jin spat out the blood of a Monster that had entered his mouth.

His current appearance after massacring seven Monsters was quite a sight to behold.

On his face, streaks of blood he didn’t yet wipe away had solidified, and his armour

had become unrecognizable, after being completely repainted with blood, top to bottom.

All this was due to the combat style he naturally developed, one that was born out of the Orc's rough and unsophisticated instincts. He was massacring Monsters worse than Monsters themselves could, with cruelty and no mercy shown.

*"Ptooey, tooey!!"*

While still looking like a blood-thirsty demon when seen from other's perspective, Sae-Jin started moving his feet.

But after he took only a few steps forward...

Suddenly, a strange vibration could be felt by his senses. Since it was something he couldn't really fathom, he changed his Form into the Ebony Wolf which possessed far sharper senses.

'This is...'

And that's how he was able to pick up the metallic smell so faint, it was close to being undetectable, coming from a great distance away.

And it was a somewhat familiar smell to boot.

'Vampires.'

Judging by the variety of smells, looked like there were more than one. The chances of their number being over ten were pretty high.

'... What's going on?'

He became greatly curious as to why Vampires were moving in a group, when they were well known to prefer moving around solo – as well as to what that vibration he felt just now could be.

Unfortunately, the distance was just too great. The likely location of where their smell was coming from was over 10 kilometres away, judging from how faint it was even with his olfactory sense deployed to the absolute maximum.

“...Way too far.”

Changing back to the Human Form, Sae-Jin’s brows narrowed. He thought about returning home and ignore this, but he still felt quite uneasy. The mere fact of those Vampires moving around in a group meant that they were busy doing something definitely dubious over there.

‘Well, since I can’t be sure, I should call someo... Hmm?’

After deliberating for a while, Sae-Jin pulled his phone out from the pocket and then...

All of a sudden, the smell of Vampires disappeared.

At the same time, a powerful shock wave coming to life from out of nowhere thundered across the horizon.

*KWAAAAAHAAHANG!!!!!!*

A stupendously loud noise that ripped the skies asunder; the vibration that shook the earth; no, this wasn’t some measly vibration at all.

The earth’s crust itself was undergoing a transformation.

“...Oh, f\*ck.”

When the flat piece of ground he was standing on began rising up sharply, Sae-Jin rapidly assumed a Monster Form.



Normally, a Monster field referred to areas that fell under the influences of a Dead Fissure. A Dead Fissure referred to a Fissure that was ‘dead’, meaning it did not expand any further but still continue to produce Monsters from within.

However, at 2 o’clock in the afternoon...

A Dead Fissure ‘suddenly generated’ on the boundaries between the Monster field of Gangwon Province and the adjoining North Gyeongsang Province.

And the result was... the earth’s crust was twisted apart by the distortion caused by

the Dead Fissure's appearance, and a portion of the North Gyeongsang Province had become a new, uncategorized Monster field.

As this was quite possibly the worst catastrophe to befall this country ever since its inception, the government immediately declared a state of national emergency.

[Currently, the areas where Monsters of the Dead Fissure is rampaging in are the counties of Moongyeong, Wuljin, Bonghwa, Youngju, and Yehchun; in other words, one third of the North Gyeongsang's total surface area. All citizens of the North Gyeongsang are advised to evacuate to the South...]

Unfortunately, even though all the Knights residing in the neighbouring Gangwon Province sprang to action almost immediately, the casualties numbered in the thousands, and the damage to property was thought to be truly astronomical.

And what made the matters even worse was that the scale of the destruction was still increasing even now.

"Uhm, Director-*nim*..."

That was why a cold tempest wind that contradicted the hot Summer weather was blowing within the halls of the Special Investigation Division, the folks entrusted with preventing such disasters from occurring in the first place.

"What?"

"That is... Mister President has summoned you to the Blue House..."

<<<<

Yu Baek-Song sighed out grandly after hearing her subordinate. She was busy alternating her attention between the various reports coming in from the affected areas and the live news broadcast on the television.

"Fuu..."

On top of the desk belonging to Yu Baek-Song, who was busy massaging her temples while her forehead was deeply creased, was a single notebook. It was the only method of communication with the Mercenary Lycan. But there hadn't been a single reply from him appearing on this mysterious notebook for quite a while now.

“Hmph. It seems that chaos is breaking out even in the President’s office. Then, I’ll be on my way.”

Yu Baek-Song deliberately tried to speak in a relaxed manner, but it was incredibly difficult for Soo-ins to hide their true emotions. Her pure white tiger ears atop her head that usually stood up straight, were drooping down low, demonstrating how upset she really was.

“Make sure to take care of things during my absence.”

The subordinates present all looked on at the sight of Yu Baek-Song’s petite figure trudging towards her execution ground with pitying eyes.

And precisely one hour 30 minutes later, she returned even more downcast compared to at the time of leaving. Not only her ears, even her tail had lost all energy.

Still, she declared out in a deliberately energetic expression.

“Call for a press conference. We’re making a public apology to Lycan.”

And an unrest quickly developed within the office.

The ‘evidence’ given out by the Lycan while claiming to know everything already, did indeed sound like a proper lead to follow. They even had found a Summoning Stone by accident, after all.

But the issue with the Lycan was just how trustworthy he could possibly be. With only a piece of Mercenary application paper dating back from 20 years ago, and every other scrap of information lost during the decline of the Mercenary profession, there was just not enough info to determine whether his achievements and abilities were real or not.

“But, there will be a lot of problems...”

“The President gave his go-ahead already. I’m sure we’ll be criticised by one or two Minority Races Rights groups, but by applying the laws regulating Mercenaries, there should be no problems, legally speaking. And also... since we know that this isn’t a natural phenomena, we need to grab hold onto any straws we can find.”

Yu Baek-Song’s decision was unchangeable.

Since it was impossible for a White Tiger, famed for its inflexible ego, to apologise just because of some external pressure, it could only mean that even herself had made up her mind well beforehand.

And such a determination would not be changed easily, so her subordinates didn't speak any further and simply did as they were told.



At the same time Yu Baek-Song had made up her mind.

Kim Sae-Jin was lost.

The sudden twisting of the land caused the previously-nice-to-walk trails to become a difficult mountainous terrain, and the banks of stream had now changed into a steep cliff...

And to compound his misery, he had to assume the Orc Great Warrior Form which he had been avoiding using until now, all thanks to encountering three upper Mid Tier Monsters. It seemed that there was a *problem* with the machines separating Monsters by their Tiers.

'... Imma go crazy here.'

That was not the end, though. On top of all this misfortune, unexpected leeches had appeared.

"Right now, the Raven Knights Orders has been deployed near here."

The leeches were the group of survivors busy following behind him like a row of baby ducks.

About an hour ago. After defeating a upper Mid Tier Monster called 'Bladed Ghost' with some difficulty, a group of three survivors had approached him before he knew it and stared at him with doe-like eyes, full of hope.

They probably wanted to rely on the 'beautiful' fame of the Demon, no, the Hero Orc that everyone had heard of.

'Should I have left them then?'

Back then, he thought they might die if left alone, and since they didn't say anything before following him so he let them be, but now...

"Whew-oo. What a relief..."

"It's all thanks to that Orc, isn't it."

"Indeed. But compared to what I've seen on TV, his beard and his hair has become much longer now. It's all shiny and stuff. It's really awesome-looking."

And as he walked westward after thinking there might be an exit there, he continued to 'pick up' more survivors and before long, three had ballooned to 13.

9 of them were Hunters, while the rest four were Knights.

He entertained the idea of leaving it all to the Knights but from what he could overhear, they were at most low Mid Tiers. They wouldn't be much of a help in this place where only the Monsters classified Mid to upper Mid Tier continued to pop out.

"Hmm... Will it be alright to take a photo of his back? He's pretty sexy for a Monster, you know."

"...Huh. What the heck are you even saying right now when our lives are still hanging in the balance? Please don't do anything that might agitate the Orc."

While hearing that conversation, Sae-Jin sighed out inwardly.

It was then, suddenly his intuition rang the alarm bell.

Fortunately, there was only one movement. No, it was just one person moving.

"Something's coming!! Get your weapons ready!!"

A Knight who also sensed the movement shouted out loudly.

*\*SFX for sound of light footsteps\**

Following the sounds of light footsteps...

"...Oh!!"

...A lone female Knight revealed herself from behind the thicket. It was Kim Yu-Rin.

And when Kim Sae-Jin saw her, with her body covered in vegetation and Monster blood, his heart nearly jumped out of his mouth.



# CHAPTER 65

## THE DEAD BALL (2)

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*– Among those missing from this disaster is the Chairman of the Society, The Monster, Kim Sae-Jin...*

Although the number of victims numbered in the thousands, there was one particular missing person that caused much hullabaloo around the world.

And that missing person was Kim Sae-Jin, the leader of the Society rated C+. As he was being seen as the guy to lead the Monster-related industry in the future, his disappearance caused quite a bit of shock.

“Fuuh... Just what the hell is this...”

Thanks to the news of him going missing, a proverbial storm had ravaged through the mansion of Yu Sae-Jung’s family and the people working for them.

Of course, it was all Yu Sae-Jung’s handiwork.

Currently, the Monster field had turned into a hellhole where Monsters of all different Tiers ended up chaotically mixed together with no clear separation whatsoever.

Thus, Knights Orders only selected Knights ranked Mid Tier or higher to enter the field. Knights with lower Tiers were ordered to remain at stand-by behind the defensive line set up around the perimeters.

At first, Yu Sae-Jung followed the order without much complaints.

But that was only until she heard the news of Kim Sae-Jin going missing.

It was a pure coincidence how she got to hear this piece of news and after becoming really nervous, she tried to call him on the phone multiple times. When her attempts all failed, she then tried to jump over the defensive line and enter the Monster field.

Obviously, she was stopped by other Knights and the soldiers stationed there, and after causing a scene while shouting at them to let her go, Yu Sae-Jung was dragged

back to her home about one hour ago.

However, she didn't give up. Instead, she clung onto her grandfather and sobbed and begged him.

Her grandpa, Yu Dae-Ho, was taken back at her actions which he had never witnessed before until now. But he also knew well enough not to send his granddaughter to a definite killing field. So, he promised her that he'd mobilise all of the considerable resources of the Dawn to find Kim Sae-Jin's whereabouts.

Even then, Yu Sae-Jung searched for a chance to escape her confinement from the Yu household mansion, and in the end, the resident Wizard was called in to imprison her in her own room.

But still, she continued to throw a fit in a manner Yu Dae-Ho could never truly understand, such as breaking the windows and pounding on the door endlessly.

"What is Sae-Jung doing now?" (Yu Dae-Ho)

"She has fallen asleep at the moment, sir."

The butler of the Dawn household, Park Hyun-Oh replied with mixed feelings.

"Did you give her that potion with relaxation or whatnot effects?"

"...Yes, sir."

"Besides that, just what kind of relationship does my granddaughter have with that bastard Kim Sae-Jin that makes her behave like this?"

It was in poor taste as the guy in question had been swept away in this crisis and it was still unknown whether he was alive or not, but as the grandfather of Yu Sae-Jung, Yu Dae-Ho just had to express his anger and hostility at the man.

At the Chaebol's words, Park Hyun-Oh scratched the back of his neck and shook his head.

"Their relationship isn't what you think it is, sir. Rather... it's our Miss who has developed a one-sided crush on him."

“...What did you say?!”

For Yu Dae-Ho, that was even more unacceptable. Just who the hell was having a one-sided crush on who?! From his perspective, it wouldn't even be enough for countless men to throw themselves in front of Yu Sae-Jung's way, but this was...

“How the f\*ck do you know about this???”

When a momentary bout of anger exploded out, Yu Dae-Ho had to forego his status as the most powerful elder ‘statesman’ of this household, at least temporarily.

“Haha... Ah, that is... I checked the messages received and sent on her phone...”

“WHAT DID YOU SAY?? Why the hell are you bastard looking at the messages of my granddaughter?!”

“...But sir, you have ordered me to ‘manage’ our Miss until she becomes a full fledged adult.”

“...Keheum.”

The replies of the butler were calm and concise. Yu Dae-Ho, with his face crimson, tried to calm himself as well and leaned his back against the sofa's backrest.

“...Fine, but what is the progress made so far?”

“Searching of the low Mid Tier hunting ground where Kim Sae-Jin has allegedly gone hunting is 70% complete as we speak. However, we still have not located a person nor remains that could be identified as our target as of yet, sir.”

“Hmm... Wait a minute, 70% complete already?”

Yu Dae-Ho tilted his head slightly in confusion.

The current low Mid Tier hunting ground was now a field full of Mid and higher Tier Monsters due to the distortion of the earth's crust. But how come the search had advanced by that much in such a short amount of time?

“This was something even I was not aware of either, sir, but it seems that several international Knights Orders, including the likes of Allene and Veritas, have sent their

Knights in to assist with the search.”

“...Hu-uh. They are doing something so easy to see through. They didn’t even bother to show up during that Africa incident...”

Yu Dae-Ho shook his head in a disapproving expression.

All this, just for the benefits called the Athany doll and/or the Orc’s weapons. Their foolish intentions were so easy to see through – hoping to be rewarded for their generous efforts if and when Sae-Jin was found alive.

“Well, I’ll go and talk to Sae-Jung’s father, so you take full responsibility of stopping that girl.” (Yu Dae-Ho)

Yu Sae-Jung’s current set of abilities were more than enough to become a Mid Tier Knight, but she was still a low Mid Tier right now. And what’s more, during these tumultuous times, it’d be a great luck just to avoid dying a dog’s death by going over there.

As a man who deeply loved his granddaughter, he’d do anything to avoid losing her at all costs.

“Yes, sir. Please leave it to me.”



“It’s Kim Yu-Rin!!”

The survivors cried out loudly while pointing at the Knight revealing herself from behind the thicket. With the situation being such a chaotic mess, people here simply didn’t have much mental leeway to remain polite and stuff.

“Is everyone alright?”

Kim Yu-Rin asked the survivors while her chilly blue-coloured, Mana-infused sword pointed at the ‘Demon’ Orc.

“Yes. Everyone’s doing okay, thanks to this Orc...”

“...This Orc? Whatever, just come over to this side, now.”

Almost right away, all the survivors ran over to the back of Kim Yu-Rin.

Sae-Jin felt quite bitter at that. This was why the old saying of ‘never take under your wings a dark-haired animal’ was invented... (TL: “검은 머리 짐승” it loosely means humans are ungrateful animals, or something similar to that effect.)

“Uhm, excuse me, Miss Knight? I think it’s fine to lower your weapon now. That Orc is...”

“There are other Knights to the rear of my position. Please make your escape from this place with them. Hurry!!”

But, Kim Yu-Rin didn’t lower her sword. With an unshakeable attitude, she evacuated the survivors first, all the while continuing to stare down at the Orc often referred to as the Hero.

Throughout all this, her sword tip pointed unflinchingly towards the Orc’s head.

‘... What should I do now?’

Kim Sae-Jin the Orc’s lips were drying up real fast. Even if his strength had gone through the roof as the Great Warrior, taking on a Highest Tier Knight was still impossible.

After all, she was ranked 9th in South Korea, and 33rd in worldwide rankings as a Highest Tier. Even the Orc’s instincts were cowering before the huge gap in their power level.

“...”

One second. Three seconds. And then, five seconds. Time continued to tick by, but the female Knight remained silent, while the Orc was busy shedding cold sweat drops.

A chilly wind blew across the night sky. Under the bright glare of the moonlight, Kim Yu-Rin brought out Mana sleeping within her body outside.

Mana that was boiling like the dancing flames soon became a thin layer that covered her entire body. It was the Mana barrier, the greatest protective shield only the Knights boasted about using.

She was finally done with her preparations, and as things had come this far, even Sae-Jin had to grab hold of his mace tightly.

*\*SFX for a low grumbling growl\**

However, just as she was about to launch into Sae-Jin's direction...

From somewhere, a low growl of a Monster resounded everywhere like an unpleasant vibration.

"...?"

At this suspicious noise, the taut tension between Sae-Jin and Kim Yu-Rin eased somewhat.

Yu-Rin quickly surveyed the surroundings for a moment, before her eyes went extra-round at the large head that poked out from the forest behind Sae-Jin's position.

At her strange reaction, he too got surprised and turned his head around to see what was going on.

And a hideous dragon-type Monster was there.

A giant snake-like body covered in jet-black scales; a face that resembled a still-growing dragon.

The legendary creature often seen in the oldest of old folktales, sometimes even referred to as the 'Little King' in Greek – Basiliskos.

A Basilisk.

It was a Monster that resided in the deepest caverns within the High Tier Monster fields. It was an infamously powerful Monster that, in the case of a fully matured individual, a minimum of six High Tier Knights were needed to hunt.

And the reason for such a terrifying creature to roam around here? Most likely, the location of its residence – the deep caverns – had become all mixed up due to the earth's crust distorting about.

"...Oww, crap."

And judging by the concerned reactions of Kim Yu-Rin, it was quite clear that this Basilisk was a fully matured one as well.

*\*SFX similar to ji~~~ but instead, done by a Basilisk\**

<<<<

The Basilisk raised its head high and surveyed the area around it. Then seemingly having found its next meal, the Monster shot forth its powerful glare towards their directions.

In that moment, Sae-Jin sensed a strange feeling of his feet becoming heavy. It was probably the 'Eyes of Petrification' that the Basilisks obtain upon fully maturing.

This effect also affected Kim Yu-Rin as well; and so, two people – more specifically, one woman and one Monster – ended up rooted to the spot, staring at each other.

And sure enough, Sae-Jin could fully understand the complicated light gleaming in Yu-Rin's eyes.

The subjugation of the Basilisk by partnering up.

Without saying a word, he grinned slightly. He then showed her his answer by gripping his mace tightly.

"...Huu."

No matter how friendly it was to humans, there was something scary about an Orc's smile. But Yu-Rin was not in any position to worry about such a thing right now. If she could not defeat that Basilisk here and now, the survivors and her fellow Knights busy making their escape would fall into great danger.

She withdrew the sword pointing towards Sae-Jin.

And that became the signal.

*"\*SFX for an Orc's roar\*"*

Sae-Jin roared out and instead of his mace, he swung his claws around.

Currently, he was busy deploying the Eyes of the Wolf and the Claws of the Wolf as well. Since he was in the Orc Form, their powers were lessened somewhat but still, it was enough to *erase* the effects of the Eye of Petrification.

He quickly scattered the darkish brown ‘energy’ between himself and Kim Yu-Rin, and sent her a signal with his eyes.

And at that moment she nodded her head, Sae-Jin rushed towards the Basilisk as his feet let out thunderous explosions.

His reddened muscles bulged until they might burst under the activation of Skills ‘Whirlwind Dash’ and ‘Warrior of Reversal’; he then powerfully jumped into the sky.

His aim was to hit the head of that lizard with the Fierce Strike.

But of course, the Basilisk wasn’t going to let him get an attack in that easily.

The bastard opened up its mouth very wide and spat out thick green-coloured breath towards the airborne Orc. It was the Basilisk’s Breath, capable of melting pretty much anything it touched.

But that green Breath was blocked by a wall of Mana that suddenly popped out of nowhere.

This time, it was Kim Yu-Rin’s turn.

Well, she was a Highest Tier Knight who had transcended the limits of the ‘High’ Tier and reached that certain plateau, after all.



The ferocious battle only lasted for ten minutes. The magnificent and showy battle was probably enough to wow the entire world but, it was inevitable that there would be incredible damage caused to the actual arena itself.

The acidic blood of the Basilisk had spread all over the place and as a result, the powerful rotting stench came from everywhere. And within the radius of 500 metres, all vegetation was either uprooted or was cleaved in half.

The battleground was so devastated, it was simply impossible to even imagine that



this place was a lush forest only five or so minutes ago.

“...Ahhh...”

And finally – propping her body with her sword acting as a cane, Yu-Rin was doing everything she could to hold onto her consciousness, but in the end, with a short whimper, she collapsed on the ground.

‘... But seriously, that was just too damn amazing.’

With some extra stamina provided to him by a spare potion ‘Spiritualised’ and stored within his body, Sae-Jin was able to remain standing; he recalled the short but fierce battle that took place just now and exclaimed out in deep admiration.

The tirelessly dancing sword aura of Kim Yu-Rin – the adjective ‘beautiful’ perfectly described the clear Mana-infused sword auras that were simply wondrous to behold.

“Fuu.”

He searched his surroundings for a bit.

As a Basilisk had shown up here, there was a good chance that Monsters with lower ranks would have scurried away from this place.

So, it was probably safe to relax somewhat.

“Whew-oo.”

Kim Sae-Jin then carefully searched for any signs of people around the vicinity before changing back to his Human Form. He then approached Kim Yu-Rin lying on the ground. And when he slowly lifted her up...

“...Mmm...”

Kim Yu-Rin’s muffled voice leaked out from between her lips.

In that moment, Sae-Jin’s head blanked out. He thought she had passed out but instead, her body was trying to move...

“...Mmmhm...”

“...Whew.”

But fortunately for him, she was just mumbling in her sleep.

After sighing out in relief, he carried her in his arms and quickly moved his feet.



“Uh! It’s a person!!”

Sae-Jin didn’t have to walk too far to meet the searching Knights. These Knights discovered Sae-Jin walking closer from the distance with Kim Yu-Rin in his arms and hurriedly ran towards his position.

“Mi, Mister Kim Sae-Jin!! We were looking for you. We are dispatched from the Goryeo Knights Order...”

“Can you take care of Miss Kim Yu-Rin first?”

As his consciousness was all hazy and stuff, all Sae-Jin could think of at the moment was to head home as soon as possible.

# CHAPTER 66

## THE DEAD BALL (3)

---

Kim Sae-Jin returned home after somehow shaking off an avalanche of reporters, several Knights and even an ambulance.

As soon as he came back, he headed straight to his bed. And he finally got to enjoy a deep and restful sleep in a long, long while. It was because the Orc's desire for battle had been fully satisfied by the deadly encounter with the Basilisk.

And so, the sun rose on yet another morning; Sae-Jin felt great as he got up and when he switched on the TV out of habit...

He got to experience the symptoms of his brain suddenly stop functioning for a moment or two.

The reason was the footage of the press conference held by the Chief of the Special Investigation Division of Police.

The so-called Special Investigation Division of the National Police.

The special bureau within the Police Force that specifically dealt with the criminals possessing Traits or the knowledge of Mana Utilisation.

Nominally, the Special Investigation Division formed a part of the overall administration of the government, but due to its nature of dealing with 'special' circumstances, it was treated as a separate entity most of the time.

On top of this, the treatment its employees received was better than some run-of-the-mill Knights Orders, so there had been many cases where talented Knights were scouted away to the Division instead.

But, just as the status within the society and the prestige indicated, pride the Special Investigation Division possessed as an organization was incredibly high. *(TL: From now on, I'm shortening it to "SID".)*

Some people called them 'egoistic' or 'conceited' but in truth, ever since the Division's

inception, it had faced tens of thousands of cases yet the number of times they failed to solve the crime numbered in a single digit, so their pride was indeed fully justified.

“...What the heck is wrong with her?!”

That was why, back then, Sae-Jin wrote the words of ‘I’ll accept the job after you apologise’ half out of mischievous mind – which, now that he thought about it, was him behaving like a brat.

A public apology from the Chief of the SID. Now that was pretty much the same thing as the entire organization bowing their collective heads at him after reining in their pride somehow. And such a thing had never happened, not even once in the history before.

*– The Mercenary Lycan had been working hard all by himself to prevent more tragedy from unfolding after predicting the occurrence of these incidents. However, we at SID ended up committing a grave sin by calling his efforts terrible acts of hate crime...*

The voice coming out from the quivering lips of Yu Baek-Song was feeble and rather pitiful.

Before he knew it, Sae-Jin had taken a proper seat before raising the volume of the TV.

*– The result of SID’s investigation is that, these Monster-related incidents are definitely crimes and not accidents, and during the course of our investigation, a Vampire who had requested for protection from the government two years ago has become one of the prime suspects...*

While he dazedly stared at the cutely bobbing mouth of Yu Baek-Song, his mobile phone began ringing loudly next.

He couldn’t tear his eyes off the TV, but still managed to answer the call.

“Hello?”

*– “Oppa, it’s Sae-Jung. Are you unhurt?”*

The call was from Yu Sae-Jung. Strangely, her voice was so small, it was lower than even a normal whisper.

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

– *“Whew. That is good... I...”*

She couldn’t finish what she wanted to say. Out of the blue, he could hear the loud, angry shouts of “You little rascal!! Are you calling him...” from the other side of the line and promptly, the call got cut off there.

“...What was that all about?”

And as Sae-Jin was tilting his head in confusion...

– *I, Yu Baek-Song, as the Chief of SID, is making this public apology to Lycan the Mercenary, and also wish to earn his cooperation as well.*

He could hear the declaration of apology from the aloof White Tiger.



Two days later.

He had never seen chaos quite like this one.

The anxiety regarding the Monster field that had suddenly expanded twice its original size had subsided incredibly quickly and instead, the news regarding the Lycan had the country in total upheaval.

As expected, devastating ripples of making a White Tiger apologise publicly, who seemingly had never apologised to anyone ever, had far-reaching consequences.

So, the public and the media kept their eyes and ears *very* wide open for the response from the Lycan – whether the legendary Mercenary would accept the apology from the SID that tried to have him prosecuted as a criminal and start working for them, or just like until now, stay silent over the matter.

‘Imma go crazy over here...’

But in reality, the person central to this chaos, Kim Sae-Jin was deeply mired in regret and dilemma while looking at the messages Yu Baek-Song had written on the communication note book.

*They* said that a stone thrown without care would kill a frog – now that he had thought about what he had done, he did indeed behave too damn thoughtlessly. He didn't have to think too hard to realise that, for SID, their pride and fame was hanging in the balance over solving this crime.

And he just had to make fun of such people like some damn airhead...

“...Fuuuuu...”

Sae-Jin grandly sighed out and lied back down on the bed.

Vampires – or, those damn bloodsuckers.

He wasn't able to “think” about them in-depth lately, but his anger towards them remained true.

The thoughts still swirled in his head – *Why did those bastards murder my mom? Was there a particular reason for that or was it simply to fill up their hungry bellies? And also... Just who is responsible?*

These days, whenever he thought about these questions, his anger boiled so much that sometimes he even woke up in the middle of his sleep.

Perhaps, Monsters' instincts also affected him there. The Wolf, for some reason, hated Vampire species, and Orcs as Monsters didn't know how to calm their anger without fighting, so...

He believed that, no matter which Monster Form end up assimilating with him, the fury towards the Vampires would only get stronger and not weaker.

After a long, long deliberation while trying hard to think under the clear mindset and logic of a human being, Sae-Jin came to a decision.

His fault in this matter was just too big to ignore. Plus, the debt Vampires had with him was even bigger. And most importantly, didn't these bastards throw a “dead ball” at the population of the planet Earth first by using these incidents, so would it be okay to let them be, just like that?

After sorting out his thoughts, Sae-Jin wrote down his replies on the notebook.

And around ten minutes after he made his reply.

News media sent out 'breaking news' reports.

=====

[Breaking News] [Lycan Accepts SID's Commission]

(First Edition)

=====

[Comments 4830]

– *OMG. He accepted the job?! But these cops made him into a criminal* ☐ ☐; [Liked 2093] [Disliked 858]

↳ *Honestly, he is a criminal. He murdered Vampires.* [Liked 398] [Disliked 693]

↳ *U crazy nutter. These incidents were caused by the f\*cking Vampires, but you call these motherf\*ckers humans? They are f\*cking worse than f\*cking animals, that's what it is. Hey you f\*cking bloodsucking c\*cksuckers, compensate me for my destroyed house, you c\*nts. The f\*cking poster above mine sounds like a Vampire so, someone trace his goddamn IP or something.* [Liked 673] [Disliked 203]

– *But man – the Lycan was a real Mercenary? My uncle, who acted as a Mercenary for a short while as the whole thing came to a crashing end, says he's never heard of the man.* [Liked 1681] [Disliked 1458]

↳ *Ur uncle's a bi\*ch, that was why, you fool.* [Liked 381] [Disliked 158]

↳ *Most Mercenaries regular citizens heard of are all bottom feeders in reality. The really powerful Mercenaries would never hand over their personal information to anyone, because it might threaten their lives, right? And there were lots of Mercenaries who worked while never registering as one, too, but if records remain, then the credibility is*

99%. [Liked 481] [Disliked 38]

↳ *The post above mine is correct. The jobs of Mercenaries 20 years ago was to kill hostile races, so why would he advertise who he is unless he's gone senile in the head? One mistake, and he'd be assassinated the next day.* [Liked 581] [Disliked 48]

– *Wow. Does this mean the war between the races are starting again?* [Liked 1581] [Disliked 958]

↳ *No, you crazy? We just need to find the Vampires responsible and kill them all.* [Liked 581] [Disliked 358]

↳ *What do you mean, kill? We should rehabilitate them ㄱㄱ. It's people like you making this world cruel and dangerous to live in.* [Liked 181] [Disliked 458]

↳ *Don't make me laugh. Did you know that 80% of all Vampires sent to prison commit suicide? They kill themselves after resisting drinking animal blood, saying how much they hate that stuff. Rehabilitation? What a joke. Just kill them all.* [Liked 481] [Disliked 358]

Over four thousand comments appeared in less than three minutes on the news articles that popped out ten minutes ago, after the Lycan had accepted the commission. It showed how highly focused the public's attention was towards this crime and the Lycan's decision.

“...Whew-oo.”

However, Kim Sae-Jin was letting out a soft sigh as he gazed at the contents of the notebook.

[There isn't much space left in this notebook now. We need a new method of communication.]

Maybe it was because he had added a simple enhancement on a regular notebook, the pages were all filled up. It was quite understandable as how this happened; the SID must have felt rather anxious, judging by the daily messages which easily filled up each



page that were sent by them all the while Sae-Jin was busy ignoring their calls...

He fell into a thought.

There were two ways to handle this situation. Give them another note book, or meet them face to face and get this over and done with.

The former option was simpler and safer. The latter option was far more complicated and there was also a lot of risk involved.

But still... Sae-Jin chose the latter.

Of course, he wasn't going to reveal his identity. No, it was simply pushing 'Kim Sae-Jin' the public persona forward as the intermediary.

Also, the Lycan in the Mercenaries' records was a completely different person to Kim Sae-Jin as well. Never to forget, by the time Lycan began moving stealthily in the shadows ten years ago, he was living a grey-coloured life in an orphanage with no dreams and hopes of the future so, there was just no way he'd be suspected of anything at all.

'It should be better this way.'

If discovered, then there was the danger of getting arrested for the crime of public fraud but he still chose to go ahead with the latter option. Like this, he'd be able to demand them to reopen the case of his mother's murder that happened well over ten years ago.

[There won't be no other methods of communication. If there is something you wish to say to me, call the leader of The Monster, Kim Sae-Jin.]

This was what he wrote down.

And in the underground conference room for the SID where the message was received...

"..."

Yu Baek-Song's face became momentarily blanked out. It was the same for the other top agents present in the conference room to plot their next course of action.

“...Why did the name of Kim Sae-Jin pop out of this thing? Oi, you. What the hell is this sh\*t?”

“Pardon?”

Yu Baek-Song bluntly poked the agent sitting next to her and asked him.

“That, that is... Maybe they are, uh, friends?”

“What did you say Kim Sae-Jin’s family relations were?”

“Nothing. They are all dead, sir.”

“Then how the f\*ck does he know the Lycan?!”

Yu Baek-Song narrowed her brows and glared at the agent.

“...Please excuse me, sir.”

The agent received this stare for a short while, and then became the proverbial beam of light as he quickly ran off to somewhere.

“Kim Sae-Jin... I’m hearing this name way too often nowadays...”

Yu Baek-Song leaned against the backrest of her chair and in an expression pregnant with unknown meaning...

<<<<

YAWN~~~

She let out a mighty yawn.

A Divine Beast was still considered young at the age of 40, and as such, Yu Baek-Song still needed plenty of sleep.



After the incident of the Dead Fissure's sudden appearance had calmed down somewhat.

Kim Yu-Rin found herself in a deep dilemma while playing around with her phone.

"By the way, that Kim Sae-Jin must really be an incredible guy or something, right? He even has a personal connection with the Lycan! Maybe the rumour of him using his Trait to regress back from the future is true after all?"

"...No way. That's just stupid. Oh, right! Hey you, did you submit those papers in yet?"

Currently, Yu-Rin was taking a break in the temporary Rest Stop near the Monster field. Stories concerning one certain man completely filled up this place.

"What papers?"

"Didn't you see the public notice that went up? Saying The Monster is looking for new members."

"Ahh, that? Of course I already submitted my papers. Well, I hear that in the Dawn Order, almost everyone, including the High Tiers, all submitted their forms. Even the Raven's upper Mid Tiers might do the same, or so I hear."

Yu-Rin stopped listening to the incoming yammerings and began lightly tapping on the table with her fingertips.

She was busy recalling the memories of four nights ago.

That was when she subjugated the Basilisk with the aid of the Hero Orc; Sae-Jin appearing suddenly and approaching her, who had fallen down from exhaustion after the battle; and the Orc that had gone missing almost at the same time...

"The time difference is just too short... hey, wait a sec. Kim Sae-Jin said he could *communicate* with Monsters, so maybe... Maybe, he also succeeded in taming the Demon Orc?!"

But how... even still, could he possibly tame something so humongous?

*“\*SFX for a pained groan\*”*

She began to develop migraine from thinking so hard. She massaged her temples while glancing at the LCD screen of her phone.

[Kim Sae-Jin 082-2349-3048]

Besides the questions lingering in her mind, shouldn't she still need to express her gratitude for helping her out back then?

She swallowed her saliva and made the call.

*\*SFX for ringtones\**

Unfortunately, he didn't answer his phone again.

“...Ahhhh~”

And there was yet another evidence of a missed call from her. Kim Yu-Rin felt so embarrassed and began roughly tousling her hair up.



At the same time Yu-Rin tried to call him.

‘Will it work now...?’

Kim Sae-Jin in the Goblin Form was concentrating on an experiment.

‘If I fail again, then I'll be in *Mana O-Ring*....’ (TL: This is a Korean online gaming slang term. Bastardised from the gambling term, “all-in.” *Mana O-Ring* means *Mana* is completely used up.)

This was the inherent danger of crafting a highly specialised item.

The more specialised the purpose, the higher the complexity its manufacturing process was.

This was his 13th attempt already. Just to make one lousy item, he was about to experience the dreaded *Mana O-Ring*.

“Fuu...”

First, he used the skill ‘Ruler of the Water’ now at Level D, on 100 millilitre of his own blood contained within a beaker, then he extracted pure Mana from it.

Then crystals would form from that Mana. However, the Kim Sae-Jin’s Mana crystals had no use whatsoever in this form. But if he added these to the process of Magic Tattoos, then it was another story altogether.

Originally, a person’s particular Traits and Skills were contained within that person’s *unique* Mana signature. Of course, it was plainly impossible to give his Trait over to something else in its entirety – but with the rising Proficiency Levels of the related Skills, it became possible to imbue a part of his Passives to other materials.

In other words, Kim Sae-Jin was trying to add one of his Passive Skills to a regular material and in the process, create a special tool.

The Skill he wanted to transplant was the ‘Wolf’s Sense of Smell’. And the tool created with this Skill was a necklace designed to sniff out the unique smell emitted by the Vampires.

The tool would operate like this: the core of the necklace where the Wolf’s Sense of Smell has been added to, would also come equipped with another attribute added to it thanks to the Orc’s Smithing Technique. When the tool detected the particular odour, it would start vibrating and emit a crimson light.

It did indeed possess some similarities to regular magic artifacts on sale to the public. But it exceeded them in terms of performance as a powerful Skill was wholly imbued into it – although having said that, the Skill’s effects would be somewhat weakened, but still.

For now, even making one proved to be tough challenge for him; and he was making a specialised investigation tool because of the current circumstances and not something with a variety of actual uses, but...

But as long as he could become proficient in the manufacturing process, then he’d be able to craft better items in the future so this was all perfectly fine by his standards.

Plus, his Proficiency points were shooting up through the roof as well.

“...Keheung.”

Sae-Jin in his Goblin Form poured absolutely every fibre of his being into performing the Magic Tattoo, and then finished up with the Orc’s Smithing Technique. And this was his thirteenth attempt today. If he failed now, then that was it for the day.

“...Heup!!”

He then controlled the characteristics of the moisture in the air, and successfully created an odour that closely mimicked a Vampire’s own musk. It was that metallic smell that nearly caused him lose himself to anger just by sensing it.

When the smell slowly approached the necklace, suddenly, a clear red light began emanating from the item’s surface.

“I did it!!”

Changing back to Human Form, Sae-Jin picked up the necklace and let out a relieved sigh. But because he had used up a lot of his Mana until now, he felt dizziness assaulting him.

But there was no time to rest.

*Knock Knock Knock*

– *This is the Chief of the SID.*

...Since he had made an appointment with Yu Baek-Song today.

When he confirmed the time remaining for his Human Form, there was still 4 hours left. That was enough.

He quickly headed towards the entrance to open the door, but then, stopped in his treks.

‘... Right – my scent.’

The scent coming out of him was just enough to make normal humans feel friendly towards him, but the story became more complicated if a Soo-in was involved.

And Yu Baek-Song was the so-called 'pure-blooded' 1st generation Soo-in, one of only eight remaining in the world. Since her sense of smell would be more developed than other Soo-ins, his scent might be just too effective on her.

'... Huh. There shouldn't be a problem, right?'

However, if she couldn't even endure the urges of some random scent, then she shouldn't even be called a Divine Beast in the first place. He let go of his worries and then, opened the door.

# CHAPTER 67

## THE DEAD BALL (4)

---

“Welco...”

Kim Sae-Jin opened the door wide.

However, there was no one in front of him. And when he confusedly lowered his gaze, only then did he find Yu Baek-Song looking ‘up’ at him with a dissatisfied face.

Pure white hair. Sharply shaped eyes. Tightly shut lips where he could easily spy her stubborn personality... Her perfectly defined facial features definitely showed the beauty of the Divine Beast seriously well.

However, for Sae-Jin, what drew in his focus more was not her facial features but the two perfectly cute pair of ears standing straight on top of her head and the stiff tail of a tiger on her back.

‘She’s... a lot smaller than I thought?!’

Falling into even more confusion, Sae-Jin looked down on the top of her head. Frankly, the impression he got was that she was quite a tall person from all the televised interviews that only showed her face.

But hell, wasn’t this at the level of a middle school student?! At a push, what, 155? 156 centimetres tall?

“Keum, keum.”

Yu Baek-Song spat out a couple of fake coughs. Quite unlike the first impression of being scary and mean, he just couldn’t help but think she was really a cute little girl, what with her small stature and sharp face all working nicely together.

“...Welcome to my place.”

Kim Sae-Jin quickly bowed his head. And Yu Baek-Song wordlessly looked up at his face for a while.



That continued for a bit longer.

And then... she began doing the very thing he was worried about.

*“Sniff, sniff.”*

Yu Baek-Song’s nose twitched as she began sensing the scent coming off Sae-Jin’s body. And as expected, there was a certain addictive quality to his scent; her actions of sniffing him up didn’t end there.

*Sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff~~*

She totally forgot all about the real reason for coming to meet him and was completely immersed in smelling him. The stiff tail had become loose before anyone knew it, and was now gently swaying from side to side. And those cute but straight ears of hers had also become softened and rounded as well, slowly fluttering and all that.

“Are you alright?”

“...Ahh. Excuse me.”

When Sae-Jin called out to her, Yu Baek-Song could finally regain her senses from the stupor of his scents.

“I’m Yu Baek-Song, the Chief of the SID.”

She handed over a business card with her small and pretty hand. The jet-black card contrasted her pure white skin. Sae-Jin received the card and then offered her his hand for a shake.

“I’m Kim Sae-Jin. If I were to say what my job is, then it’s the Chairman of a Society.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you. Is it fine for me to enter?”

“Please.”

When he stepped aside, she entered past the front door and into his house.

*“Sniff, sniff...”*

And as soon as she was inside, she began to sniff the air again.

“...Keum.”

Kim Sae-Jin swallowed his saliva in slight anxiety. It had been almost a year since he started living at this place. He had been living here while using various Monster Forms, so there should be quite a lot of accumulated odour of Monsters in here.

“Your house smells really nice.”

But fortunately, Yu Baek-Song seemed to focus less on the fleeting smells of Monsters and more on the Scent of the Wolf instead. She then expressed her satisfaction at this great (?) atmosphere.

“Is, is that so? Well... Please follow me.”

He carried a bitter smile as he guided Yu Baek-Song to the living room.

No actually, he tried to.

She was moving with some difficulty. She'd take a few steps, then stop and start sniffing the air. Then she'd recover her bearings, start walking again for a few more steps, before stopping again to sniff, sniff...

“...Um, hello?!”

“...Your interior décor is pretty nice.”

As she spoke those words, there was a certain light glow on her face visible to naked eyes. If one thought she seemed terse and stubborn in appearance initially, now she looked rather coy, somehow. Seriously, she was indeed a Soo-in whose mood would change according to the environment she was in.

“Ahh... well, thank you. Please, follow me. There is something I'd like to show you.”

“Understood.”

Only then did Yu Baek-Song follow him in while making the sounds of pitter-patter.

Just past the passageway and into the living room, one could see the Sae-Jin's favourite

couch where he just loved to lounge around. And even Yu Baek-Song didn't simply walk past that couch. She too gravitated towards that particular piece of furniture naturally, as if it was done all subconsciously.

"This is it."

Sae-Jin picked up the necklace and spoke confidently. But unexpectedly, there wasn't any reaction. And when he turned around in confusion to see what was going on...

"..."

He witnessed Yu Baek-Song breathlessly shoving her face all the way up into the couch and busy sniffing it.

"...Excuse me? Excuse me!!"

Sae-Jin had to call for her three, four times after that. However, she didn't even pretend to hear him. In the end, Sae-Jin had to pick her up by the scruff of her neck and move her away from his couch, like one would pick up a stray kitten.

"Ahh!! Hey, what gives?!"

Yu Baek-Song threw a temper tantrum and flapped her limbs around, but then, quickly remembered the sorry sight she just showed off, so she let out a fake cough and tried to act composed.

"Keum. What is it? Grabbing someone else's scruff already..."

"My apologies. It seemed like you were too infatuated with the scent."

"Infatuated?!... Whatever. So, what was it you wanted to talk about?"

"Ahh, that is..."

He gave the freshly-crafted necklace to Yu Baek-Song. She stared at the necklace resting on her palm in silence, before asking him with her head tilting slightly.

"What is this?"

"It's a tool to differentiate Vampires from the populace. With this, even a normal

person can easily find out whether there is a Vampire in the vicinity or not. Please, try it on.”

“...Hmm.”

Yu Baek-Song’s facial expression was of extreme distrust, but she still tried to put on the necklace.

“How do I put this thing on??!!”

Unfortunately, as expected of a Divine Beast who had never worn any accessories whatsoever in her life, she didn’t succeed.

“This son of a...” (Yu Baek-Song)

As there was no progress made the longer the time was wasted, besides getting Yu Baek-Song’s face into a deeper frown and her mood all riled up so, losing his patience first, Sae-Jin stepped in to help.

He walked up towards her and personally put the necklace on her neck.

“Euah~ah...”

However, in the middle of trying to put it on, a strange and *steamy* breath touched the edge of his collar bones. He got so surprised, he quickly withdrew from there.

“...Kkeung.”

Yu Baek-Song avoided his gaze while pretending nothing was wrong, but her two deeply-reddening cheeks told no lies.

“What, what? No, besides that, what the heck is this thing?”

She then deliberately shouted loudly in an aggressive growl. Sae-Jin chuckled slightly and explained the abilities of the necklace.

“But it looks like a regular necklace, though...”

Yu Baek-Song muttered to herself as she fiddled around with the necklace around her neck.

“You can trust me. While searching the areas around the Gangwon Province with this item equipped, you will be able to track down those Vampires hiding among regular people.”

“Even though I don’t need this thing to distinguish Vampires?”

Before he knew it, she was already addressing him without any honorifics but somehow, it didn’t feel too bad. In reality, although her face looked especially young, the gap in their ages was close to twenty years anyway.

<<<<

But funnily enough, it felt like he was being spoken to not by a much older adult, but by a very young kid instead.

“Well, I’m sure that a Divine Beast can do that with ease. But, isn’t it impossible for the other agents?”

“...Hmph.”

With her ears standing up straight, she began thinking for a bit.

The abilities of Vampires to blend in with the crowd was so fantastic, even the 1st generation Soo-ins that enjoyed senses sharper than normal animals had real trouble differentiating them.

And, most of the 1st generations had almost gone ‘extinct’ now. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say, there were only Yu Baek-Song the Divine Beast and Kim Sae-Jin throughout the entire world who could smell out a Vampire with their noses only.

“Did Lycan make this thing? And he told you to pass it over to me?”

“Eh? Ahh, well... you can think of it as Lycan and I have cooperated on its creation.”

“Heum...”

Yu Baek-Song took a suspicious glance at him before nodding her head.

“Maybe it’ll help out with investigation. We’ll see. But besides that.”

She easily undid the necklace. It was simpler to take it off rather putting it on, so there was no trouble this time round.

“Isn’t there some kind of info Lycan is supposed to give us?”

“Huh? Oh... Let’s talk about that a little later. For now... there is a condition attached to handing over that tool to SID.”

“...A condition?”

Her brows narrowed at the sudden change of topics. Her expression was of how unhappy she was, but...

“Of course. It’s not for free. Since it was so, so difficult making that tool...”

Sae-Jin subtly got closer to her. It was in order to let her smell his scent better.

“Eu, eumhm?! ”

He only got closer by three hand spans. But she was visibly panicking. It even seemed that making eye contact with him was getting difficult for her.

“...You see, the thing is...”

His expression slightly hardened when he thought about his mother. He got closer to her a little bit more.

“W, wait, don’t come closer...”

Yu Baek-Song found it hard to keep her thoughts straight as the thick scent invaded her senses. She tried to arouse her strong mental resistance to endure this onslaught, but... But his scent was simply too much for an immature Divine Beast to withstand.

On that day, Sae-Jin was able to get a definite answer from Yu Baek-Song. As expected, trying to win over a Divine Beast by using nothing more than his scent was difficult but the fact that she was a 1st generation Soo-in came to bite her in the rear – since by having highly developed senses meant that she would also react very sensitively towards his scent.



Kim Sae-Jin crafted five more necklaces per instructions of the SID, and they paid over whooping \$4.5 million US for each one of these artifacts.

Afterwards, things moved swiftly, to the point where the Lycan didn't even have to help out at all. That was how great the abilities of the SID agents were. Within a week, they were able to arrest 39 Vampires, and also uncover the fact that seven of them were indirectly related to this disaster of the Dead Fissure as well.

When that happened, several reporters who wrote articles that supported Vampires, as well as members of the Rights Groups that advocated for the Vampires' Rights had all vanished into thin air.

With these discoveries, it became somewhat clear that Vampires had blended into the human society. The public showed great indignation at this fact, all the while singing the praises of the SID's swift response and Kim Sae-Jin's timely inventions.

And The Monster's Class was readjusted to B- after its contribution towards the investigation was acknowledged publicly.

Additionally, as the land price in Gangwon Province hit rock bottom, buying up the available land concluded faster than expected. This whole buying up land was one part of the future strategy both the planning department and the financial department had suggested.

It was definitely the case of a blessing in disguise.

And that was how a Society, founded less than a year ago, had grown to become one of the biggest in the country that possessed over ten thousand *pyoung* of land in the Gangwon Province. (*TL: 1 pyoung = 3.305 square metres.*)

"Development of the Society's lands?"

"Yes. I believe this is the perfect timing."

The planning department Chief Soh Jin-Hui came to see him and submitted a report. With curious eyes, he began pouring through it.

The report was filled with many ideas on how to utilise the nearly ten-thousand-

pyoung-wide land. A theme park using Athany as the mascot; a luxurious magic shop that sold artifacts that Sae-Jin would make in the future; and plans of forming an alliance with Hazeline's Yoseon Alchemy House, then converting the area around there into an exclusive district reserved for the Goblin Alchemist and the Orc Blacksmith.

"They are all good ideas, but... wouldn't they cost a lot of money?"

"No, not at all!! If I do this together with Mister Yu Dohng, then I can definitely get us lots of savings!! Plus, several famous international Societies are already doing similar businesses as the one I'm proposing, and have met with great success so far! We can do even better than they did! On top of that, many Knights Orders said they will help us!"

Soh Jin-Hui sounded so enthusiastic. Sae-Jin smiled deeply while gazing at her.

In any case, he was not worried as far as the abilities of the people he had picked were concerned. And simply holding onto money was the same as letting them rot, so investing them this way was probably the right thing to do.

"...I understand. Please, give it your all."

Giving his permission, Kim Sae-Jin signed his decision on the report. Seeing this, Soh Jin-Hui did her absolute best to suppress the overwhelming emotions and bowed her waist deeply at him, then left the office of the Chairman.

As soon as she left, Sae-Jin could hear her energetic shout "Hooray!!" of celebration coming from the hallway.

Kim Sae-Jin's face held a thin smile from that, but soon, his expression hardened once more as he pulled out another document from the desk's drawer.



## CHAPTER 68

### THE DEAD BALL (5)

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Two weeks ago.

The month of October began with ‘The Monster’ serving as the hottest topic in town.

In order to recruit new members for his Society, Kim Sae-Jin uploaded a notice on the home webpage and then advertised it on his SNS profile. His reasoning this time was that having only ‘6’ members – while he was three of them in truth – when the member limit for the Class of his Society was 250 (*excluding employees*) seemed like a bit of wasted opportunity to him.

This was quite a departure from the other Societies with Classes higher than B that recruited new members in total secret; the home webpage then ended up crashing due to all the traffic after the declaration of the public recruitment went online, leading to many news outlets to focus on this matter and report on it.

Apparently, huge chaos erupted in the various community chat rooms dedicated to individual Knights Orders, such as that of the Dawn Order; allegedly, some Knights affiliated with the same Orders even held meetings to determine what they should do.

And the final number that had applied during the week-long recruitment process that included Knights from both local and abroad, Hunters and Wizards, was as many as 3000. If one was to count in people from other professions, then that number swelled up to 4000, making it even more ridiculous.

However, among these applicants, there was one man that made Sae-Jin rather anxious.

Kim Yu-Sohn.

The boss of the Mercenary’s Tavern, and the man responsible for transforming Sae-Jin into the legendary Mercenary, Lycan.

‘Does he know?’

Kim Yu-Sohn's Trait involved dreams and people. While dreaming, he could see from the perspective of a specific person for a short while.

In other words... there was a good possibility that Kim Yu-Sohn was aware of Sae-Jin being the Lycan already.

"Hmm..."

But then again, he wondered if it was better to bring the source of his anxiety closer to his side instead. More importantly, even though they had never met face to face, his credibility was completely assured. If he was a bat-like person, then he'd have sung the tune the moment SID began poking him.

Plus, Kim Yu-Sohn certainly worked his butt off for a person he had never met before. He had taken the records of his own past when he was working as an A-ranked but still-nameless Mercenary and modified it into the Lycan's, and thus made it so that, when the SID tried to investigate Lycan's prior activities, instead of suspicion, the confidence in this "legendary" Mercenary would rise instead.

*– Mister Chairman. Mister Kim Yu-Sohn has come to see you. Should I admit him in?*

Speak of the devil... Kim Sae-Jin breathed in deeply.

"Let him in, please."

He greeted Kim Yu-Sohn while being somewhat nervous.



"...That means, you knew from quite a long time ago?"

Kim Sae-Jin's worried premonition proved to be right. Kim Yu-Sohn said that around three months ago, when Sae-Jin was 'rampaging' around as the Demon Orc, he had figured it out. No, rather than figuring it out, it was more like he came to understand, instead.

"Yes. The truth of the Chairman being the Lycan... I came to understand somehow, in one certain moment."

"You meant to say... you saw the *others*, as well."

“...Yes.”

Indeed, Kim Yu-Sohn said he got confused quite a lot. Sometimes, his dream would start as an Orc, sometimes as a Wolf, sometimes even as a human.

Because he suddenly had dreams as Monsters, he had to wonder if his Trait had leveled up or something like that. But he got to truly understand when Sae-Jin in his Orc Form ended up saving countless people.

“Well, I’ll be. It’s a bit embarrassing, isn’t it.”

When seen through the Eyes of the Wolf, Kim Yu-Sohn had not one speck of ill will in him. If he had any evil designs to begin with, then he would have started blackmailing him a long time ago already.

“Will it be alright for me to know this truth?” (Kim Yu-Sohn)

Even though his worries had become a reality, strangely enough, he felt as if a burden had lifted off his shoulders. In any case, he didn’t think his secret would be maintained forever anyways – and also, he couldn’t have kept it inside him forever, either.

“No, no. Of course it’s not like that. It is my Achilles heel, after all... Hmm. Looks like I don’t have any other choice.”

“...Pardon?”

At Sae-Jin’s words, Kim Yu-Sohn’s body shuddered. The middle-aged man must’ve thought that what Sae-Jin said was equal to his intentions of *disposing* him, and so, he began to slowly retreat back.

“Looks like you’ll have to stick by my side for a long while, then.”

Fortunately for him, though, Sae-Jin simply smiled and reached out for a handshake.

“...Oh. Hahaha... Y, yes. Thank you kindly.”

And on that day. The construction of a new Mercenary’s Tavern commenced on the grounds of The Monster, with Kim Yu-Sohn serving as its boss.



The amount of things to do after becoming 'B-' Class Society increased by a lot – such as, registering as a corporation, acquiring related business licenses, and of course, recruitment of new Society members.

Thanks to that, almost the entirety of the time limit for his Human Form had to be spent on taking care of the Society's administrative work, and that naturally led to him having less and less meetings with other people for private matters.

“Does Oppa really need to do that selecting new members thingy?”

And so, it became a daily occurrence for Yu Sae-Jung to come and see him in the Chairman's office after ending her own days of work – only after the punishment period set out by her Grandfather had ended, of course.

It couldn't be helped, as Kim Sae-Jin wouldn't meet her anywhere else other than here.

“Yeah. Besides, there are only about 100 people left, so.”

“Hmph... I can also help out, you know?”

“I can finish up in 30 minutes if it's 100 people. And well, you're only a Mid Tier, so let's not.”

“Wah, again?! You looking down on me again? Didn't I tell you that a normal Mid Tier and the youngest-ever Mid Tier is completely different?”

Yu Sae-Jung's brows narrowed in a deliberate show of her displeasure. He simply smiled at her dissatisfaction and finished up with the last of the authorisation work needing his attention. With this, his daily admin duties were done for the day, as the interviews with the applicants would only take place on the following day.

“Umm, Oppa?”

Yu Sae-Jung was carefully studying Kim Sae-Jin for a bit as he got up from his seat. Then, with her fingers fidgeting around, she asked him.

“...You can't make time today again?”

Everyday. She wanted to do something – anything – with Sae-Jin.

However... he checked the remaining time for his Human Form. One hour, 30 minutes. To be with her, it just was not enough.

“No, no. It’s not like I wanna go some place specific. Just... we can go to Oppa’s place, you know?”

Quickly reading his mood, Yu Sae-Jung carefully added more. Her shy appearance was powerful enough to worsen the repressed desires residing within his heart, but Sae-Jin was somehow able to endure it, and he quickly shook his head.

“You’re still too young to say you’d go to a bachelor’s place like that. Just train diligently in the basement training facility.”

He gently stroked Yu Sae-Jung’s head once and headed outside the office.

His destination was the Monster field. Since the earth’s crust became distorted, the entry was now heavily restricted for regular civilians as well as for the lower Tiered Knights, but Sae-Jin had things to do there.

“Mm?”

But suddenly, Yu Sae-Jung approached him and grabbed hold of his arm.

He turned around to see why and then, forgot what he wanted to say. She was biting on her lip, and her eyes were wet with tears.

Yu Sae-Jung breathed in deeply, before slowly opening her mouth.

“Where are you going? Can’t I come, too?”

“...No. You can’t.”

Regrettably, Sae-Jin had to be firm.

Of course, as he was not a total idiot, he had already seen through her feelings for him that had developed some time ago.

She always came to see him the moment she got off from her duties. And then after

parting ways, she'd send text messages until they went to bed. Without having a deep affection for him, she'd never do those things.

"Why not? You always say I can't, but why not?"

"Because... you're still young."

For someone like Sae-Jin who had never held a deep enough relationship with opposite sex, this was the only excuse he could come up with.

No.

If he made up his mind, then...

He could've told her everything about this motherf\*cking Trait of his. After all, Kim Yu-Sohn was aware of the truth already, anyways.

But then, she was not Kim Yu-Sohn. Because Yu Sae-Jung was someone incredibly precious to him, someone Kim Sae-Jin had connected with after going through so much, and that caused him to be reluctant.

The potential misunderstanding, fear, and terror she might feel after seeing him transform into Monsters played heavily in his mind. And most importantly of all... the reason why she even began to have these feelings for him in the first place, was due to the Skills of Monster Forms. It was not a feeling that had naturally developed.

What would she think, once she found that out?

The instincts of Monsters shouted out within him that none of his worries mattered, but the Human Kim Sae-Jin didn't want to hurt this still young and naïve girl.

"You are..."

Of course, Yu Sae-Jung couldn't accept such a reasoning. If he was to continue pushing around the excuse of her being young, then why did he give her all those subtle hints with skinship??

She clenched both her fists tightly. She wanted scream out at the top of her lungs and ask him, whether he was leading her on with these cheap baits or not – but also, wasn't she too big of a fish for him to jerk around?

But...

“...I got it.”

Even though she found herself pitiful and pathetic, she didn't want him to hate her.



“*Keuhur-urhur...*”

The Manticore let out a strange cry as it collapsed on the ground. Kim Sae-Jin the Ebony Werewolf then shoved his claws deep into the Monster's heart.

[The Mana Stone of the Manticore has been absorbed.]

- All Stats rise.
- A new Passive Skill, ‘Vocal Cord Reconstruction’, has been acquired.

[Vocal Cord Reconstruction] [Skill Level: F]

- When the Level rises higher, the host will be able to speak even when in the Monster Forms.

‘... What the hell is this?’

<<<<

The very first Monster he ran into upon entering the Monster field was a Monster he had an experience fighting against – the Manticore. Back then, he didn't have the leisure to stay and absorb its Mana Stone, so he found this encounter a rather fortunate development.

And the victory came much easier than he thought this time, thanks to a ‘Branded Goods’ item stored within his body with Spiritualisation.

‘But why the hell is this Skill so rubbish?’

He didn't like one bit about the Skill he got after absorbing the Monster's Mana Stone.

Things were a lot different when it came to Sae-Jin absorbing the Mana Stones of upper Mid Tier Monsters.

It was because he'd earn a new Skill simply by absorbing one Mana Stone. That meant, as long as he successfully hunted a upper Mid Tier Monster, that would serve as the fuel for his exponential growth.

Plus, as the entry to this place was heavily restricted, there were no Knights or Hunters in the vicinity as well.

'But, maybe it's not today?'

However, all of those was side distraction for the main reason. Kim Sae-Jin was roaming around the Monster field every night simply because of the 'premonition' Kim Yu-Sohn had.

He said, *'I've dreamt of a sole Vampire walking within the Monster field. I believe that there might be a big harvest if you catch this individual and make him talk by either intimidation or by coercion.'*

"Heummm."

Kim Sae-Jin let out a fake cough for no reason.

"Mm?"

Funnily enough, he really did sound like a human just now.

"Wat de?"

Of course, correct pronunciation was still a bit too much for now. Kim Sae-Jin could now sort of understand how a Manticore could 'sing'. It wasn't the kind of Skill with a variety of uses but well, he began moving his feet while deciding to feel happy about it since having more Skills was always better than not having any.

And shortly thereafter, Sae-Jin found the smell he was wandering around for.





A British national of “Hispanic origins”, a bottom-feeder Vampire named Dwayne was able to enter South Korea with minimal issues thanks to his identity as a Hunter from a First World country. His role was to investigate the lay of the land within the Monster field after it had gone through the distortion.

Specifically, to investigate the portal that would lead to their home world as well as the Dead Fissure, and then submit the findings to his superiors.

*\*SFX for sounds of shaking grasses\**

And as Dwayne was walking around doing his job, he heard the sound of grass being disturbed from his back.

He quickly turned his head around to look but he could see no living creature there. Thinking that it might have been the wind, he brought his attention back to his front.

“...Uh.”

And then, something else filled his vision up.

It was a lone Wolf.

A gigantic bipedal Wolf.

The Wolf made a suspicious grin and slowly opened up its jaws in a terrifying manner.

“Eet’s ben a wile.”

“ ... ”

A heavy, low-frequency voice. Even though the Wolf only spoke a single line, Dwayne passed out where he stood with bubbles forming in his mouth.

“...Wat de?”

It sure was a strange reaction, but Sae-Jin could figure out the cause right afterwards.

There were 2~3 Skills related to his voice alone. And when those Skills blended in

with the Wolf's own voice, the fear effect doubled in its potency.

'Whatever. Less work for me.'

Sae-Jin confirmed the Dark Energy rising from the unconscious Vampire, and then formed the Dark Energy Link with him.



Kim Sae-Jin left a mental order of 'cooperate fully with the questioning' on his imprisoned Vampire, and then tied him up in a place far from all human activity with a note that said, "This guy will spill everything out if you torture him".

After arriving back home, he phoned Yu Baek-Song.

Since they had met a few more times in private already because of his mother's case, Sae-Jin thought they had gotten a bit closer. That's what he thought.

"Miss Baek-Song."

– *"... I'm gonna hang up."*

"Huh? Why?"

– *"Didn't I repeatedly tell you to address me by my full name or I won't even speak to you, eh?"*

Unfortunately, Yu Baek-Song was still a feisty little Divine Beast and without the influence of his scent working on her, she maintained a cold attitude towards him.

"Miss Yu Baek-Song."

– *"Okay, what?"*

"Please send someone to the address I'm about to give you. Lycan said he has left a Vampire in there."

– *"... A Vampire?"*

Sae-Jin told her the address where the Vampire was.

“By the way, what about the matter I asked you about?”

– *“Oh, that. All the related info is ready.”*

“Then let us meet tomorrow.”

– *“You wanna meet?!”*

Yu Baek-Song showed signs of hesitation. Obviously, because of his scent.

“Yes. We can’t entrust the delivery of such important data to a courier service or to an agent, after all.”

– *“... Fine. I’ll call you tomorrow.”*

While maintaining that indifferent tone of hers, she hung up.

## CHAPTER 69

### A NEW STARTING POINT (1)

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The following day, the time was noon with the blazing sun overhead.

Kim Sae-Jin had no choice but to walk straight into the proverbial den of the tiger, located in the middle of Seoul. Yu Baek-Song had chosen her own house as the meeting place this time, in order to minimise the effects of his scent that had permeated into everything he had touched.

And so, right now, he was checking the contents of several documents while placed a fair distance away from Yu Baek-Song inside her house. His expressions were solemn and grave, but in total contrast, Yu Baek-Song was busy sniffing the scent that still somehow managed to cross the room with her tail slowly swaying from side to side.

“...Huh.”

As Sae-Jin was studying the documents, a hollow chuckle broke out before he knew it.

Within these papers provided by Yu Baek-Song, several truths he had absolutely no idea of were recorded.

One of them was the fact that his mother... was a Mercenary and the father he didn't even know he had, was a Knight. His mom retired from the life of Mercenary the moment she became pregnant with Sae-Jin, and his father took the job that was meant for his mom, and ended up getting killed by a Vampire.

And most of all, the fact that all this information was 'cleansed' out of the Korea's government archives, now that was something he just could not understand why.

“I wasn't the Division Chief back then, but anyways, I can see a lot of suspicious things in there. First of all, there's a trace of the SID performing investigation into the matter... but someone completely removed the existence of all the records.”

Yu Baek-Song studied Sae-Jin's reactions and then continued to speak.

“Additionally, your mom was the subject of special surveillance by the National Police

for a period of 8 years, meaning from your birth until her death. Such a thing only applies to either an important eyewitness or a prime suspect of a case, but I don't know why your mom was being watched at all. As I've said before, all records had been erased clean."

Sae-Jin raised his head. There were small pools of moisture around the corners of his bloodshot eyes.

"In other words, you are saying, right now you don't know the full details?"

"...Yep. For now, this is the limit of what can be found. More time needs to pass before something can be done."

"More time?"

Yu Baek-Song narrowed her brows slightly.

"I'm currently the Chief of the SID but that doesn't mean I'm the top cat there. We are still the part of the government, you know. The former Chief is still a part of the Administration too, so who knows just what kind of trouble might end up stirring once I start digging into an old cold case? I don't wanna face such unknown dangers."

However, Sae-Jin did not withdraw his fixed gaze. Yu Baek-Song let out a grand sigh in the end.

"...Also, there just isn't enough number of agents available right now. You are aware that all of SID's resources are focused on these Vampire incidents, right? You just have to sit tight for maybe three years, until this chaos is resolved."

"...Fuu."

Maybe, what Yu Baek-Song said was correct. To dig into a case that was nominally *closed* over ten years ago, and furthermore, a case that for some unsavoury reason, was erased from the history – even if it was someone like Yu Baek-Song, the burden of danger would be great.

Unfortunately, Kim Sae-Jin as he was now couldn't be considerate towards such a thing. Even if he had to resort to cowardly and unfair tactics, he needed to uncover the truth as quickly as possible.

“...Miss Yu Baek-Song.”

Sae-Jin increased the power of the Skill, ‘the Scent of the Wolf’, to the maximum. He even deliberately spoke in a baritone voice as well. He then conquered the two of her most vulnerable senses, the hearing and the smell.

“I, I told you, I’m not gonna...”

He took large steps towards Yu Baek-Song. Then, he reached out to grab the shoulders of the retreating woman. Her petite body shuddered.

“Six months. I don’t think I can wait more than that. How about it?”

Kim Sae-Jin leaned over and whispered into her ear. Her tiger ears imperceptibly quivered – a sign that his voice was working its magic. He then gently stroked the flapping ears while continuing with his next words.

“I’m not saying you should do it for free. I will give you one item you desire from our Society. With that, it should be enough to satisfy those *upstairs* people who might get irritated.”

He added this new condition. The doll of Athany version 2.0 was an item the government begged him incessantly for. With that, *they* should forgive him for at least a handful of misdeeds.

“T, that... I, I don’t, know, I... no...”

Yu Baek-Song’s voice was shaking so pitifully now. This indescribable feeling that was burning up her body was something she had never experienced before in her life.

“Please... let go...”

She needed to resist... One punch would be enough to knock this bastard out... but strangely, her body wasn’t moving as she wanted it to. That warmth transmitting from her ears sent her consciousness into a blur, and plunged her body into a state of trance.

“Heu...”

In the end, she breathed out roughly and leaned into his arms as if to embrace him.

“There is no need to worry. This is a wonderful proposal, after all.”

While carrying a cold smile, he whispered into her ear.

That became the critical final blow.



Two days ago.

Agents of the SID were mobilised towards a certain hill with little to no human activity, and as Lycan had said, they found a Vampire tied to a tree and terrified out of his mind.

The agents dragged the guy back to the SID headquarters and then, began interrogating him for the past two days.

But it was the craziest thing. The Vampire caught by the Lycan was different to others of his kin and sang like a canary. As he was a bottom-feeder, he didn't know all the important details, but still, the general information provided by the Vampire that was directly involved in this matter was like a sweet, sweet rain on the dry desert that was the current SID.

Initially, the SID thought about using this information to continue investigating in secret, but they chose to apply pressure to those Vampires hiding among the general populace and so, they delivered all the necessary details to the media outlets. And they stumbled over each other to break the news first.

And so, the information revealed this way caused a huge shock throughout the country and the world. From the Western European nations that maintained the position of amiable relationship with Vampires, such as France, Germany and England, strange atmosphere began to leak out; and from the other extreme end of perspective, there were signs of racial cleansing operation about to resume in China.

“As it has been reported in the various media outlets, from the combined investigative work performed by the Lycan and the SID, it has now come to light that the Vampires' final goal is to rip open a Fissure to its biggest yet and in the process create a portal that should lead them back to their home world.”

Even though the SID had revealed all the information already, countless reporters still showed up for the press conference; Yu Baek-Song was standing in front of them and

loudly announced the findings. Innumerable camera flashes threatened to blind her, but her eyelids didn't even flinch.

"Additionally, the number of Vampires hiding in the society is far higher than estimated. And they are divided into factions that serve different leaders."

This was everything Dwayne the Vampire had confessed to.

"I shall now answer your questions."

When Yu Baek-Song began accepting questions, reporters threw up their hands in fierce competition as if they were waiting for this moment. She pointed at the reporter sitting in the front.

"What relationship does Lycan have with Kim Sae-Jin of The Monster?"

"...I don't know. Ask me questions related to this case, please."

*Why the heck is the name of Kim Sae-Jin uttered in this place??*

Thinking so, Yu Baek-Song frowned a little and then pointed at another reporter.

"Currently, a new rumour of both the Lycan and you, Miss Yu Baek-Song, joining the Society, The Monster is..."

*What the hell is this sh\*t, now?!*

Yu Baek-Song didn't let the guy finish his question before cutting him off.

"There will never be such a thing. If that's all, then this conference is over."

As it seemed like there were no useful reporters here today, Yu Baek-Song chose to end the Q&A session sooner than expected and turned on her heels to leave. The reporters then belatedly began throwing the right questions at her way but she remained coldly indifferent.

And so, the press conference ended sooner than expected, but still, the truth of the Lycan's effort resulting in the breakthrough of this case had now been revealed.

Then, a strange new trend started up all over the world when it became known the



Lycan's continued efforts had played a crucial role in uncovering Vampires' goals.

And that was people wanting to become Mercenaries.

In other words, the profession of Mercenaries that had gone past the level of being in decline, and into complete dissolution was showing the signs of rejuvenation.

– *“We’ve received a lot of commissions. Jobs such as tracking, investigation, eradication, etc. They are quite varied in nature.”* (Kim Yu-Sohn)

“...Is that so?” (Kim Sae-Jin)

Thanks to this development, Kim Yu-Sohn had suddenly become incomparably busy.

– *“We should refuse them all, yes?”*

“Yes.”

Because of their current circumstances, they had to refuse every one of the commissions, but still, Kim Yu-Sohn's voice was thick with joy.

– *“And also, there have been an increase of people coming here, applying to become Mercenaries. There were a few serving Knights among them as well. That is why, Mister Chairman, how about forming your own Private Mercenary Company using this chance?”*

“Huh? A Mercenary Company?”

– *“That’s correct. Under the name of ‘The Monster Mercenary Company’. Of course, although the Mercenaries of the old operated on their own, as the times change, so should we. My son has also decided to help me out as well. If the Chairman’s thoughts and ours align, then my son and I will...”*

<<<<

“Alright. Please make it happen.”

Sae-Jin's reply was swift.

If it's a Mercenary Company affiliated with his Society, then that meant he could wield

them like his own private soldiers. Since receiving the information on his parents, Sae-Jin was thinking about doing this, too – after all, he just couldn't sit tight and do nothing while waiting for Yu Baek-Song to come through forever.

– *“I beg your pardon? Y, you are serious? Is it okay not to think it over?”*

“It's fine. Ask the financial department for the necessary funds. Oh, and by the way, will it be possible to raise intelligence operatives as well?”

– *“Ah, ah! Yes, it's definitely possible! After all, I specialised in that field when I was younger!!”*

Kim Yu-Sohn hoarsely replied in a near-scream.

“That's good. Then, Mister Kim Yu-Sohn, please take the reins of this matter and give it your best. I'll reposition you as the Commander of the Mercenary Company as well. Ah, right. Before you pick a Mercenary, please bring that person to me at least once. I'd like to see their faces.”

– *“I, I understand! However, the role of the Commander should be you, Mister Chairman. As for me... it's enough as the Director of the Mercenary Company.”*

“If that is the case, then I shall leave everything in your capable hands.”

After ending the call with the brightly smiling Kim Yu-Sohn, Sae-Jin then immediately phoned both the planning and the financial department.

And on that day, on a certain spot of land belonging to the Society, the foundation for the future headquarters of ‘The Monster Mercenary Company’ was laid out.



“Wah, what is this thing?”

Just like before, as soon as her duties ended, Yu Sae-Jung came over to Kim Sae-Jin's office.

However, today was slightly different.

Kim Sae-Jin was waiting for her to come and as soon as she showed up, he gifted her

a 'magic artifact' he had crafted, and Yu Sae-Jung's eyes went extra round at this sudden and unexpected gift in the shape of a necklace.

It was a stunningly beautiful necklace with a ruby serving as its centrepiece – a masterpiece Sae-Jin poured in a lot of effort to create.

He imbued the effects of the Skill 'Warrior of Reversal' into this ruby necklace. Depending on the amount of Mana poured into the ruby by its wearer, the strength and the duration of the Skill would vary accordingly.

Of course, it was still a pale imitation of the real Skill but, for the Knights whose positions could be decided on even the smallest differences, such an item would truly be a priceless treasure.

"I made it for you. It's an artifact, but it's a bit different from the others."

"Oh, is it similar to those necklaces you gave to the SID?"

She smiled happily and immediately put the necklace on.

"Yeah. But it's also quite different. You heard that an artifact shop is going to open within the grounds of the Society, right?"

"...Uh? Ah... Are you going to sell this necklace over there?"

Her joy was short lived, and she became really disappointed.

"Haha. No way. I've made that especially as your present, you know."

He chuckled and explained further about the necklace. Then her eyes went round again, as she'd never heard of such an artifact before in her life.

"Really? Can I try it out now?"

"Of course."

She immediately poured her Mana into the necklace. Right away, a mysterious vitality began entering her body. This explosive feeling where all the Mana in her body wanted to erupt out – although the process only lasted for 60 seconds, this experience left a huge impression on her.

“...”

As if she became an imbecile all of a sudden, she stared at Sae-Jin with her mouth gaping open. Her prior experience of buying and using countless artifacts told her all she needed to know only after using it just once.

An exceedingly beautiful exterior and a special effect added to it, this was... an incredible item that couldn't be properly described in mere words.

“I'm... giving this to you as an apology for the past. But don't be burdened by it, please. It's not purely a simple gift anyway. You're making lots of appearances in television nowadays, right? Please wear it when you are in front of the camera. If you fail to wear it even once, be prepared to hand it back, okay?”

At her frank reaction, Sae-Jin smiled in satisfaction.

In spite of that, she continued to stare at him without moving – until suddenly, a drop of tear formed in her eye.

“What, why are you crying? Did I do something wrong?”

“...No, it's not that... Just...”

*I'm just thankful.*

Instead of saying these words, Yu Sae-Jung took one big step forward and tightly hugged him.

“...Uhm...”

The Human Form Kim Sae-Jin experienced confusion at this sudden, unexpected and abrupt skinship. And his response to this situation while suffering through the confusion, came out from his instincts.

He gently wrapped his arms around her waist and embraced her even tighter.

And so, their embrace continued on until Sae-Jin somehow could recover his senses.

# CHAPTER 70

## A NEW STARTING POINT (2)

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Inside a country house located in the rural Jeolla Province, the location shoot for a certain entertainment programme was taking place. The programme was called 'Knight's Country House', considered as the hottest among the rampantly expanding number of Knights-related shows currently.

The concept of the show was as the title suggested.

Nine Knights would reside in a house located in the Monster-free area of Jeolla while performing 'missions' and 'games' planned out by the producers, as well as cooking their own meals and have honest chat together.

At first, the idea might sound rather plain, but by having 9 people with strong personalities, many entertaining situations were captured on film. For example, as eight out of the 9 participants here were groomed to become Knights from very early ages, only one knew how to cook rice properly, so naturally, chaos ensued whenever it was meal time.

Among these colourful characters, the one with most amount of fans were, of course, Yu Sae-Jung.

Although she maintained an indifferent expression most of the time, the dazzling smile brighter than the sun itself that sometimes leaked out made her such a charming woman on screen. It truly wasn't an exaggeration to say that this programme was instrumental in her official fan club being established.

So, in a way, Yu Sae-Jung had greatly benefited from this show, as well as being its most important contributor.

"It's been too long, Sae-Jung~~ This *Unni* thought she was going crazy from wanting to see you~~!!" (*TL: Unni is the female equivalent of Oppa.*)

"...Even though we saw each other two weeks ago?"

The filming of the episodes took place every fortnight, for the period of four days and

three nights, and so, it somehow did feel like it had been ages since all nine of them could sit down in one room together. They had gathered in the living room while sharing greetings among each other, and then waited for the producer to give them a new challenge.

“Wowsers, Sae-Jung! What is that necklace?”

While they were waiting, a female Knight named Kim Hui-Soo pointed at Sae-Jung’s necklace and asked.

“Yea, yes?? What?”

Although she was expecting it but now that the question was finally here, Sae-Jung couldn’t help but feel quite nervous. She did have an excuse called “indirect advertisement”, but... Well, this necklace was the very first gift that *man* had given her, after all.

“Hmph. Did a boyfriend buy it for you?”

A male Knight sitting on a couch while putting on a serious air spat out while looking dissatisfied.

He was Sohn Chul-Joon, a High Tier Knight from the Goryeo Knights Order – and supposedly, having a romantic interest in Yu Sae-Jung. Although the said interest was nothing more than Sae-Jung who couldn’t cook to save herself, utilising his skills a bit; but since they looked good together on screen, the producers, the writers and the viewing public came up with their own narratives all on their own.

“Wow, is it true? OMG, a really big event broke out before the filming even began?”

“The filming started already, though?”

“...Anyhow, Sae-Jung, did a boyfriend really give you this as a present? No, no, did Sae-Jung have a boyfriend before? Wow, Chul-Joon Oppa is so screwed now~”

Right away, all nine Knights began yapping away, with Yu Sae-Jung’s necklace being the focal point. This was the charm of this particular show, where the scenes of chaotic yammering would often fill the airwaves.

“N, no, it’s not like that!!”

In the end, Yu Sae-Jung had to shout out and only then, the sounds of their conversations died down.

Yu Sae-Jung's face reddened as if it might burst open from all the attention poured onto her by her co-stars and the film crew, which numbered around 60 people.

If this was her normally, then she would've assumed the same cold indifferent attitude and end this fiasco right there, but since it was related to Kim Sae-Jin, she couldn't maintain a calm facade at all.

"Well, it is a present, that's true..."

"But it's not from a boyfriend, is that what you're saying?"

Sohn Chul-Joon chuckled lightly and for some unknown reason, slicked back his hair.

"..."

Too bad for him, Yu Sae-Jung didn't reply.

Honestly speaking, she had never been in a romantic relationship before, and maybe because of that lack of experience, she was getting quite conscious of Kim Sae-Jin's presence, which was unlike her.

They did embrace, sure, but since he didn't say it out aloud, it seemed certain that they were not an item. But what if he doesn't like it, if she declared that fact right here?

"...What the, so, it's true?"

Sohn Chul-Joon momentarily lost his composure. Regardless, Yu Sae-Jung didn't open her mouth for a long time, until...

"Not from a boyfriend, but it's a gift and a sponsorship deal at the same time..."

In the end, she denied it.

As soon as Sohn Chul-Joon let out a sigh of relief, this time the female Knights jumped on her like a pack of hungry animals. Even though they were Knights, well, they were also women as well. The ladies began asking about the necklace, such as where did she buy it, how much was it, was that ruby real, etc, etc...

“Well, everyone, please calm yourselves. We’re filming for real now.”

Only when the producer stepped up did the noisy hullabaloo come to an end.

‘But the signs are good...’

There was a huge grin plastered on the producer’s face. It was understandable, as a potential gold mine had been unearthed only after the cameras began rolling for less than 30 minutes.

On top of that, the rare sight of Yu Sae-Jung being so shy was wonderful enough to make him want to embrace her himself...

‘No, no, no no, that’s not it.’

The producer quickly shook his head and then displayed a board with the participants’ mission written on it.

“Well, you guys must be feeling peckish by now. Why don’t we have something to eat first?”



An afternoon with the sun blazing down.

Seven Knights left on the mission, or the collection of ingredients, for their food. Meanwhile, Yu Sae-Jung stayed behind to learn how to cook from Sohn Chul-Joon.

Even though it was called how to cook, with no ingredients to practise, she was just cooking rice for now. But Sae-Jung was paying 110% attention to what Sohn Chul-Joon was saying.

Before, she only pretended to learn as there were cameras filming her, but from some time ago – no, more correctly, that moment with Kim Sae-Jin, changed her thought process greatly.

Thinking about the appearance of Sae-Jin enjoying her cooking... just imagining that alone made her happy.

“Is this enough?”



Yu Sae-Jung pointed at the pot filled with rice while carrying a needlessly determined expression.

“Yeah. There’s just enough water and it looks good.”

Seeing her adorable appearance, Sohn Chul-Joon chuckled slightly and reached out to pat her head. However, the speed of Yu Sae-Jung’s reaction was incredible, and his hand ended up dancing in the empty air.

“...Keheum. Oh, a mosquito.”

Getting embarrassed now, Sohn Chul-Joon waved his hand around twice more as if there really was an insect there or something.

“Let’s make the soup next.”



“I’ll buy you something more expensive later on.”

During the break between the filming, Sohn Chul-Joon suddenly pointed at Yu Sae-Jung’s necklace and laid on a thick smile.

“Excuse me?”

“I meant that thing.”

Discussing about buying something expensive to a 3rd generation Chaebol was the strangest thing as she could buy anything she wanted – but for the sake of maintaining a certain public image, in the interviews she always said that she lived frugally while being given an allowance. So, the misunderstanding of Sohn Chul-Joon was, well, understandable.

“You mean, something more expensive than this?”

Yu Sae-Jung looked at him with a slightly disbelieving face. Maybe this situation came about because the artifacts from The Monster hadn’t been unveiled to the world yet. Yu Sae-Jung found Chul-Joon’s attitude of looking down on the gift necklace rather disagreeable, but he remained ever so confident.

“Obviously. I know that the true value of a gift isn’t judged solely by its price, but I can tell there will be much more prettier necklaces for you out there.”

With a slightly strange expression, Yu Sae-Jung stared at him for a while, before...

“...You probably need to bring out a pink diamond if you want to top this necklace’s value...”

She muttered out softly.

Unfortunately, as he was too deeply appreciating the depth of his own comment, he didn’t get to hear what she said.

“Mm? Did you say something?”

“...No, not really.”



While Yu Sae-Jung was learning how to cook for Kim Sae-Jin, the man himself was training hard in the underground “members-only” training facility below the Society’s headquarters.

“Wow, what is this?!”

But Sae-Jin wasn’t alone in the facility. That was because the Knight Order that was chosen to partner up with The Monster, the Raven Order, had sent a Knight to aid him in his training.

“Mister Sae-Jin, your physical abilities are pretty good!!”

And the Knight assigned for this task, Yi Hye-Rin, was busy praising him.

Yi Hye-Rin was second only to Kim Yu-Rin in the looks department within the Raven Order, and thanks to her sociable personality, she was far more active than Yu-Rin in the entertainment industry.

And since Sae-Jin’s only habit was watching TV, he obviously knew who she was. Besides that, she was also one of the people who received the Orc’s weapon as well.

“If you rate me with the Knight’s standards, where do you reckon I am?”

“Hmm, maybe... Maybe a low Mid Tier? I think it might be around there.”

The reason why the Raven had sent Yi Hye-Rin out of all the Knights in their Order was, of course, the famed honey trap. After all, Kim Sae-Jin was a man, wasn’t he?

“Ah. Is that so?”

At her words, Sae-Jin felt incredibly dejected.

He didn’t strengthen his body via Spiritualisation. So, this meant that the Human Kim Sae-Jin’s Stats had reached the level of a low Mid Tier Knight. That was certainly enough to feel proud about, but...

‘It’s still too much for me to step forward, yet.’

But it was still not enough for him to fight Vampires in his Human Form.

“What the, why are you so disappointed? Even this is something amazing, you know~~”

Yi Hye-Rin still sufficiently praised the downtrodden Kim Sae-Jin. However, instead of such a courteous encouragement, what he wanted was a proper training regime.

“Shall we move on to next part of the training? Is it weapon mastery next?”

“Ah, yes. Let’s do that. Hurry, hurry~~”

After determining his physical limits, it was the turn of weapons-related martial arts training. The Orc’s special Passive, the ‘Weapon Mastery’ applied here. The Skill’s Level was so high that, now he could theoretically wield any type of weapon better than a high level user.

“What should we use first~ Eeny, meeny, miny, moe~~”

Yi Hye-Rin nimbly trotted towards the display cabinet for the weapons and picked up two longswords, of which she gave one to Sae-Jin.

“First, a sword. It’s the most popular weapon, too. Since it’s so~ straight, it’s easy to

cover it in Mana's aura, and it is also the easiest for the beginners to learn how to wield as well. But there are so, so many different types of swords out there. So, the swords we are going to use today is called a longsword..."

Yi Hye-Rin really talked a lot while always smiling brightly. At first, Sae-Jin got slightly irritated, thinking whether her personality was really that positive all the time or not, but...

"Like this, swoosh, swish!! How about it, can't even see an afterimage, right~~?"

...The more he watched her, he couldn't help but smile as well. He sort of understood why she was more famous as an entertainer and not as a Knight.

"Ah, by any chance, have you learned how to handle a sword before?"

Yi Hye-Rin asked in a surprised voice when Sae-Jin unsheathed the sword in an expert manner.

<<<<

"No, not at all. Besides some things I got used to while hunting, I haven't received any real training."

"Oh... so that's how it is."

She took the sparring stance while slightly tensing up.

"Well then, should I start the skill test?"

"Please do. By the way, you don't have to take it easy on me."

When he lightly swung the sword in order to loosen up his wrist, the afterimage of the blade wavered and danced about in the air like a snake.

"...Uhm... You really didn't learn any swordsmanship?"

His appearance simply couldn't be called 'normal', so she quickly asked him again.

"No, I haven't. But I might possess some modicum of talent, you see."

At his vague reply, Yi Hye-Rin's expression became a bit worried.

In reality, she became an upper Mid Tier Knight relying on her Trait and abundance of Mana, rather than her skills with a sword – she was one of those Knights commonly referred to as a “Trait Baby”.

Because she was the type who enjoyed living her life, Yi Hye-Rin didn't pay too much attention on polishing up her swordsmanship which required her to repeatedly perform the same action over and over again. Of course, her talents with the sword were still excellent enough to be on the level of a Mid Tier Knight, but...

“...We shouldn't use Mana or Traits, right?”

“Of course. I can't utilise Mana, after all.”

Kim Sae-Jin pointed his sword at Yi Hye-Rin. The edge of the blade gleamed sharply.

“Ready?”

“...Yes? Ah, Yes. Please, c, come.”

Hye-Rin gulped down her saliva and corrected her posture.

Sae-Jin dashed forward without much fanfare.

This would be his first time fighting a Knight as a Human. So, he wasn't too sure how to proceed with the fight. Instead, he chose to leave everything to his instincts.

Arriving at Hye-Rin's position, he lowered his stance in a blink and slashed upwards.

“!!!”

She hurriedly tilted her sword to block the attack, but realised the force behind it was nothing to laugh about. She had blocked just one hit, yet the hands gripping the sword were aching already.

But there was no time to remain stunned. Sae-Jin continuously slashed with his sword. Ferocious and aggressive, his swordsmanship was something that would not be found in any of the textbooks.

*Kwang- kwang-*

Each time she blocked his blows, sounds similar to when bombs went off, resounded out. Hye-Rin just could not believe that there was no Mana involved in his strikes.

“Eu, euah!! Hey, wait!! I surrender, I suuuurrender!!!”

Their sparring didn’t last for long.

She couldn’t endure the immense power contained with the diagonal downward slash of Sae-Jin and lost the grip on her sword.

“Ouch.”

With a sorry-looking demeanor, Yi Hye-Rin crouched down on the floor and massaged her hands that had a slight trace of blood.

“Huh? I won?”

Sae-Jin dazedly muttered out. And his words ended up poking Yi Hye-Rin’s pride as a Knight.

She gritted her teeth and stood up.

“...It’s because this isn’t the weapon I use usually. Hey, excuse me, Sae-Jin-ssi, you really didn’t receive any training before?”

Already, the honorifics she used had changed from Sae-Jin-*nim* to Sae-Jin-ssi. *(TL: Basically, a “nim” is comparable to “sama” in Jap novels, while a “ssi” is kinda like “san”. So, she’s stopped calling him Sae-Jin “sama” and started calling him Sae-Jin “san” which is slightly less respectful.)*

“No, I really haven’t. So, should we stop the training here for today?”

“What do you mean, stop? We still have lots of weapons to go through, you know?”

Yi Hye-Rin smiled forcefully and pointed at the various weapons stored inside the display cabinet. She figured that Sae-Jin only possessed some talent in wielding swords so, while puffing out hot air through her nostrils, she picked up a spear.

“A longsword doesn’t really suit my style. Now, I shall demonstrate spear arts.”

Hye-Rin confidently declared.

And then, she lost exactly seven times in a row.

But what mattered the most was that the last sparring was done with her main weapon, a thin-bladed two handed sabre.

Unfortunately, she still tasted defeat, and with her pride trampled on, she ran off back to her home in tears.



“How is the progress?”

– *“I’m working hard already, so stop pestering me.”*

Yu Baek-Song’s terse voice could be heard from the phone’s receiver.

“No, no. I’m not pestering you. Just that, I’d like to let you know that in case you need any assistance or manpower, do not hesitate and ask me. I’m sure you’ve heard of this already, but I am currently establishing a Mercenary Compa...”

– *“Don’t need it. I’m hanging up.”*

“Ahh, wait a second.”

Yu Baek-Song was really cold towards him. It was truly a mysterious thing, the way she acted. After all, she couldn’t even resist him when they meet, but over the phone, she was like an untamed cat or some such...

“There is something else as well.”

– *“So, what is it?”*

But seeing that she didn’t end the call first, there must’ve been some lingering aftereffects remaining.

“The Lycan said that, there’s a suspicious hotel.”

This was the information given to him by Kim Yu-Sohn. But Sae-Jin made it so now that it was coming from the Lycan, all in order to hide that man's Trait.

– *“Which hotel?”*

“Not sure. It was just a *hotel*.”

– *“Are you making fun of me right now?!”*

There was a trace of anger in Yu Baek-Song's voice. Kim Sae-Jin ended up carrying a thin smile, while thinking that she was like an angry cat or something.

“I'm not joking. Are you not taking the Lycan seriously now?”

– *“... No, that isn't it. However, he can't just say it's a hotel. Is he trying to say we must investigate every hotel in the country?”*

“I know, but still, please try your best. I want to help, but as it's still early days for my Merc Company, I too lack the necessary manpower.”

– *“No, that's... Fuu.”*

Yu Baek-Song spat out a long sigh, and unwillingly replied that she'd do it.



# CHAPTER 71

## A NEW STARTING POINT (3)

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He was back, once more, on the Monster field.

And Kim Sae-Jin was pouring in an incredible amount of power to smash down on the head of a Sabre-tooth Tiger with his mace.

*Kwaaahang!!*

That stupendously powerful strike created a loud noise as it caved in the skull of the Tiger that was supposedly harder than that of a diamond.

*\*SFX for a beastly growl\**

The Sabre-tooth Tiger continued to threaten Sae-Jin by swinging its claws around with its head caved in, but that was only for a brief moment. The creature began to stumble around like a drunken butterfly before collapsing on the ground.

Sae-Jin walked towards it, pulled the fangs out and pocketed them, before absorbing its heart.

[Active Skill, 'Sabre-tooth Tiger's Energy'] [Skill Proficiency Level: F]

– Instantly recovers spent stamina and Mana. However, the recovered stamina and Mana will dissipate ten minutes later and the caster will return to his original condition.

As the result he got from that final bit was quite satisfactory, Sae-Jin decided to head back home.

But, when he turned around...

The sights of two Orc Jaguars busy sending their sparkling gazes towards him filled up his view.

*“Khwoar?!”*

Sae-Jin screamed out after getting a fright of his life thanks to that ‘grotesque’ scene before him.

It was a simple scream, for sure.

However, there was a slight issue with the Monster Form he was currently using.

The Sabre-tooth Tiger was too strong a predator for the Ebony Werewolf Form to take on, so he had no choice but to assume the Orc Great Warrior instead.

Maybe that was to blame for what happened next. His scream became a powerful roar louder than a thunderclap that reverberated the entire mountainside.

*“Guwu, guwu!”*

The Orc Jaguars in front of him quickly began prostrating. And they continued to repeat that same action of bowing their heads before him.

*“...What the...”*

*...Heck is this situation?*

Sae-Jin stared at these two weird Orcs for a long time.

‘Ahhh. Maybe?’

Then a lightbulb went off in his head. He came up with a theory that could definitely explain away this strange situation.

Orcs possessed this characteristics of wanting to submit to the stronger Orc than themselves. If viewed from that point, then Sae-Jin was definitely the most powerful Orc in the Monster field that could easily make other Orcs grovel before him.

Additionally, didn’t he defeat the Sabre-tooth Tiger that was threatening the lives of these two, just now? Of course, it was the possibility of acquiring a Skill that blinded him, but still. What happened was enough for these Orcs to fall (?) for him pretty hard.

*“...I get it now, so go away.”*

Accepting this explanation, Sae-Jin gestured with his hand to send the Orcs away, then tried to go on his own way.

However, the two Orc Jaguars continued to follow Sae-Jin around. And whenever he glanced back at them, their sparkling eyes never stopped gazing back.

That carried on for another 20 minutes.

‘They do look kinda pitiful.’

Maybe because he was in the Orc Form, he began to feel sorry for these two Orcs – one a dude, the other... probably a *girl* – following him.

Judging by their armaments, they must have come from a village located around the Mid Tier hunting ground... but, most likely, when the earth was overturned, they ended up losing their home village.

Also, in the current Monster field where the Monsters of all Tiers were mixed up chaotically, the chances of a small group of Orcs surviving for long was really low – enough to say that it was a miracle these two had survived for this long.

“Fuu...”

Kim Sae-Jin let out a low sigh and looked up at the sky above.

The sun had already buried itself deep into the creeping darkness. It couldn’t be helped; weren’t the hours getting too late for him to look after these two Orcs?

He lowered his gaze towards the following Orcs.

“...Uh-whew.”

When he took a closer look, their faces looked rather friendly. Hell, he even thought they kind of looked adorable, too. Not even himself knew why he thought their horrid faces looked adorable, though.

“They could be of some help in the future if I nurture them.”

Finally, Sae-Jin made a decision. After all, if he was in a Monster Form and not a human, then the thing he had the most to waste was time, anyway.

“Come with me.”

He growled lowly and led the two Orcs away while searching for the location to set up a brand new Orc village.



He found a spot with an impressively steep cliff to the rear, which should help with the defenses, and a stream of fresh water not too far.

Sae-Jin chose to build his village in this blessed piece of land.

But before that, there was a need to perform a certain... *imprinting* work on these Orcs.

“Watch carefully.”

Sae-Jin made the two Orcs stand before him and showed them his various Forms. First, the Human, then the Goblin, and finally, the Werewolf. He deliberately left out Athany, though.

“*Euhurng??!*”

Whenever Sae-Jin changed his Forms, the Orcs’ eyes went round in pure shock, but thanks to various Skills he possessed, such as the ‘Predator’ and his scent, they didn’t try to attack, simply choosing to obey him.

And that’s how he completed the so-called ‘imprinting work’. Next, while using the Orc’s Smithing Technique, he began a huge scale construction work. Now that his Proficiency Level was at B-, the job turned into a stunningly simple and efficient affair.

By changing the characteristics of the soil, he made “wooden” fences tougher than reinforced steel rise up in specified locations. Then, on these fences, he added an attribute called ‘Damage Reflection’. This way, Monsters trying to attack the fencing would die from their own attacks – all the while failing to figure they were wounding themselves.

And 7 hours later, the new Orc’s village was completed as the morning sun began brightening up the horizon.

‘They should be able to repopulate this place by themselves, right?’

Sae-Jin heard that, whenever Orcs got *excited*, they would mate and produce as many as ten offsprings a month.

There might be some danger of... incest happening in the future, what with only two Orcs starting a village, but since these creatures didn't really care for such details, there was not much he could do on that count.

"Somehow, everything is finished."

The sweat from this unexpected labour sure felt refreshing to him. He took a long look at the two dazed Orcs over there and prepared to take his leave.

'Oh, right. Before that... '

He had nearly forgotten this important step. He approached the two Orcs, placed his hands on their shoulders and sent in his 'thought orders' to them. The contents were roughly the same as the ones he gave to Muffin in the past.

'Humans are your friends. If you find humans in danger, help them. If they threaten your life, then fight them but don't kill them. And make sure to educate your children well... '

Since it would be troublesome when these Orcs start fighting humans when Sae-Jin needed them later on down the line, he deeply embedded the guidelines of not harming humans in these Orcs. Of course, Vampires weren't included in that category of humans.

Finishing up the insemination of those thought orders deep inside the Orcs, Sae-Jin moved his feet to leave.

"..."

However, something kept on tugging at his mind and his feet wouldn't move easily.

It felt like that, by just making a village and telling them to survive all on their own, they would simply get themselves killed, probably as soon as tomorrow or some such.

"...Whew."

Sae-Jin ended up turning back.

He spent another hour fixing up the useless weapons of the Orcs up to the level of Branded Goods, and then by using up his own blood, inscribed several Magic Tattoos on their bodies as well.

Not only the Tattoos that increased their physical strength and agility, but the 'Leviathan's Scales' as well, in order to show that these Orcs were subordinates of the Hero Orc.

Of course, instead of actual scales, the Orcs' skins turned slightly blue as the Skill's effects were greatly curtailed during the process of imbuing, but still, since these Orcs were blue in colour, people might deduce correctly that they may have some relation to the Hero Orc. Meaning, they would attack these Orcs less.

'Now that I've done this much for you, grow up quickly and become my aid in the future.'

This was his final 'thought order'.

Kim Sae-Jin left behind the two Orcs who were on the brink of shedding tears of admiration and moved his unwilling feet.



A week passed by since the day of him forming an unlikely connection with the two Orcs.

A day before the scheduled broadcast of the TV show Yu Sae-Jung filmed, the 'Knight's Country House', Sae-Jin officially opened the shop 'Monster Artifact' built within the grounds of the Society. *(TL: The author wrote the name of the shop in English.)*

Although the number of items displayed for sale was only 8, each one of them had an incredible price tag. The cheapest of them all, a hairpin, cost a cool \$9 million US.

As expected, no one paid attention on the day the shop opened its doors. But after the TV show aired, the explosive reaction was enough to surprise the IT department tasked to maintaining the Society's home webpage.

However, those people inquiring about the necklace Yu Sae-Jung was wearing could only back off in utter shock after confirming the pricing.

Of course, Sohn Chul-Joon was also among these people. He thought that the necklace Yu Sae-Jung wore couldn't have cost more than a few thousand dollars, or maybe even a couple of ten thousands but then, on it...

[The Soul of a Warrior] [Currently unavailable – 15,000,000,000 KRW] *(TL: that's in Korean currency. Yes, it seems like it's a lot – in US dollars, it's \$13.682 million.)*

...There was this enormous price tag attached to the necklace.

<<<<

Initially, many people complained when these enormous prices were revealed, but when Kim Sae-Jin disclosed the extraordinary effects each item possessed, they all shut their mouths real fast.

Then, it was the turn of the Knights and Wizards to rush in. More than 100 Knights and Wizards came to the shop and had to receive tickets with the waiting number printed on it, all because the artifacts of The Monster could only be viewed by making a reservation as well as purchasing only on site.

“So, how was it?”

After two days of storm had passed, Yu Sae-Jung came to see him in the Chairman's office while carrying a triumphant air.

“Oh my, you've arrived, Sae-Jung?”

Sae-Jin gently stroked her head. She really enjoyed his touches that were full of affection.

“You're not gonna avoid me? But you did that to Sohn Chul-Joon, though.”

After seeing her enjoy his touch like a little puppy, he suddenly remembered the scene where she was learning how to cook with Sohn Chul-Joon. It was one of the most memorable scenes in the whole show, after all. Yu Sae-Jung's indifferent attitude, which contrasted so much when she was with Sae-Jin, and the sorry sight of Sohn Chul-Joon busy chasing away imaginary mosquitos.

“Obviously... Oppa is completely different from that *ahjussi*... Ah, right. And Oppa,” (TL: *ahjussi* = an old man, an uncle, etc.)

Yu Sae-Jung hurriedly rummaged through her bag, then pulled out an envelope, which she handed over to Sae-Jin.

“Mm? What is it?”

She grinned brightly.

“An invitation to my coming of age ceremony.”

“...Mm?”

Sae-Jin tilted his head at her unexpected reply. Most regular people wouldn’t hold one of these ceremonies, and even if they did, it would be on the days of their birth, at least that’s what he’d heard of...

“Isn’t your birthday 20th of April?”

Yu Sae-Jung’s birthday was still a half year away. Sae-Jin spoke with that fact in mind, but she had this face of someone who was deeply moved.

“You... you knew?!”

“Oh, yeah. Kind of...”

Actually, it was mentioned on a TV show he watched yesterday...

But he wasn’t going to mention that and break the nice little atmosphere that was forming here.

“Besides that, there’s still a half year left, so why are you giving me one so early?”

“Ah... well, that is, I’ve decided to do the ceremony on the 1st of January. Originally, it was scheduled for my birthday... but I wanted it done earlier, so I begged my dad. Whatever, you must come, okay?”

Yu Sae-Jung grabbed his hands with a determined expression. It was a skinship that occurred naturally, but as the time passed, her face got redder and redder.



“...Got it.”

Just before her face got red enough to burst open, Sae-Jin carefully extracted his hands and pocketed the invitation.

“Ah, right. Did you choose the new members for the Society?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“Yeah. I just need to announce it.”

The people Sae-Jin had picked were only two: Kim Yu-Sohn’s son and Yi Hye-Rin. It wasn’t his intention, but as he was only trying to pick the right type of people, the elimination rate ended up being a rather cruel 2000 to 1.

“Who are they~~? Please tell me~”

Yu Sae-Jung rubbed her shoulders against Sae-Jin’s body and began flirting with him. Since it wasn’t a secret to begin with, he honestly told her.

“...Miss Yi Hye-Rin the Knight?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“Yeah. You also know her, right?”

Suddenly, Yu Sae-Jung’s face froze in icy expression. But when Sae-Jin spoke in a tone indicating his belief of Hye-Rin being the right fit for the Society, she did her best to force out a smile.

“Ah... yeah. I know who she is. It’s fine, I guess. She’s got good abilities, so... A good choice...”

She suppressed the bitter taste rising up from her chest really hard. Her mind was uneasy, but if she showed off a strange behaviour in front of Sae-Jin, then he might see her as a small minded person.

“You think so too?”

Unfortunately, Sae-Jin was smiling relaxedly, completely unaware of her real feelings.



27th of October.

The Monster finally announced the successful applicants to its membership recruitment, and right away, the whole world seemed to boil over simultaneously.

And towards the new members' direction, undivided attention of the public poured in like a hailstorm.

It was fine for Yi Hye-Rin who was used to public's attention, but for Kim Sun-Ho, the son of Kim Yu-Sohn, things were quite different.

Since he retired from being a Knight and changed his job to that of a Mercenary, reporters went after his story like crazy; in the end, he had to temporarily take residence on the night-duty room of the Society's headquarters which prohibited the entry of outsiders.

"Wow. This is *sooo* big. Mister Chairman, please take a look~"

A certain afternoon on a weekend, while the media frenzy was still ongoing outside.

As the group finished up training and were enjoying a meal together at the cafeteria within the HQ, Yi Hye-Rin raised a fuss and placed her mobile phone on the dining table.

"Hey, Joo Ji-Hyuk, you too." (Yi Hye-Rin)

"...What is it now?"

Joo Ji-Hyuk, who was sitting next to Yi Hye-Rin, turned his gaze towards the projected images from the phone while his face reddened for some reason.

Four Mid Tier Knights were in the middle of investigating the changes to the land, and found themselves surrounded by Monsters and in real danger. But then, two blue-skinned Orcs jumped out of nowhere and helped the Knights to defeat the Monsters. And after the battle concluded, these Orcs even gave the Knights some drinking water and then disappeared to somewhere.

So, the protagonists of this footage were... those two blue Orcs.

“...Huh?”

Every scene he just saw was enough to almost make Sae-Jin spit out the food in his mouth.

“Wasn’t that so mysterious? This footage is doing the rounds in my Raven Order’s community chat rooms, saying they were the Hero Orc’s fellow tribe mates. For now, this story’s being buried under the Society’s member recruitment news, but soon, don’t you think it’s going to cause a huge stir later on?”

Seeing the smiling face of the totally oblivious Yi Hye-Rin, Sae-Jin could just barely nod his head in agreement.

# CHAPTER 72

## PREPARATION (1)

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“If Miss Kim Yu-Rin joins our Society, then, well – I may end up reviewing the case with a far more open mind.”

Inside the newly constructed office of the Chairman of The Monster, located in their central headquarters.

Sae-Jin was having a business-related meeting with Kim Yu-Rin.

“That is... I’d also love to join you. But I am unable to stay as long as the duration you have put forward. I believe that it will be better to not cause an inconvenience by breaking the rule of ‘10 years or longer’. That is why I ask of your gracious understanding on this matter...”

Yu-Rin came over to speak to him personally regarding two business matters this day.

One was to find out the current state of things regarding the Athany doll version 2.0, which, under the pretext of checking out the technical capabilities of the potential buyers, still hadn’t found a home yet. The other was to purchase a certain artifact now available in the Society’s new Artifact store.

The artifact in question was an obsidian bracelet called [Wolf’s Claws.]

In addition to enhancing the overall power of its wearer, this mysterious artifact had an on/off hidden function that, when activated, would transform into a gauntlet that covered the entire hand.

As its name suggested, it was truly an item that morphed into the so-called ‘Wolf’s Claws’.

Although this artifact had a seemingly ridiculous price tag of over \$17 million US, in truth, it was not as expensive as one might think since an artifact designed for combat would be rotated among the Knights through a ‘hiring’ system.

Plus, with its already-proven effects of enhancing the wearer’s strength and

endurance by nearly 30%, as well as the warranty period of 30 years added on top, it was not an exaggeration to say the price was on the low side if one considered the guaranteed profit made with it – not to mention the protection offered by equipping this bracelet as well.

“In that case, I guess it can’t be helped, but... But please, do consider it some more. Our doors will always remain open for you.”

He licked his lips at this missed opportunity.

Sae-Jin had this one more plan he wanted to carry out. And that plan was to buy a bit more land near the Monster field in Gangwon Province to expand the boundaries of his Society and then, form a Knights Order of his own which would fall under the jurisdiction of the Society.

Of course, this idea didn’t come out of Sae-Jin’s head but it was the planning department that suggested it instead.

Even though the initial costs involved with the recruitment of manpower, construction of the premises and lobbying the relevant government entities would run into hundreds of millions of dollars, not to mention another tens of millions for the annual operating budget alone, Sae-Jin still wanted to pursue this idea to the fullest.

“Uhm... then, is our meeting over?”

“Yes.”

When Kim Yu-Rin cautiously inquired, Sae-Jin indifferently replied back.

“...”

Her irides began to tremble.

All she got in reply from him regarding the Athany doll version 2.0 was “I’ll think about it”. Not only she couldn’t get a definite confirmation, this couldn’t even be called a positive understanding between them. But still, that didn’t mean she could just join his Society now.

“Perhaps it’s time for you to return?”

Actually, Sae-Jin was aiming precisely for this moment. Even if Kim Yu-Rin joined his Society, the chance of her becoming the Order Master of his Knights Order was slimmer than slim. But even with that, she was still the kind of Knight he'd want to have working for him.

"I, I still have something else to say!!" (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin hurriedly shouted out when she saw Sae-Jin stand up from his seat to seemingly show her way out.

He sat back down on his seat for the time being.

"What would you like to discuss?"

"I've heard that The Monster has recently started an entertainment company as well."

"Yes, that is correct."

About a month ago, at the behest of the planning department, Sae-Jin began pursuing a new revenue model – the so-called talent management company.

The planning department strongly suggested for this business venture, as the current members of the Society, besides Yu Sae-Jung and Yi Hye-Rin, were already huge attention drawers themselves. On top of that, he could use the equipment provided as a bait to make other Knights join the company, too.

And only after a month of operation, The Monster Entertainment was going from strength to strength. There was no point in mentioning the two that were practically top stars to begin with – Yu Sae-Jung and Yi Hye-Rin; it was now at the point where the famous celebrities, after being attracted by the halo of The Monster, were inquiring about signing a contract with Sae-Jin's company.

"I, Kim Yu-Rin, would like to sign up with your company."

"...Oh. Is that so?"

Yu-Rin made this decision with quite a difficulty, yet Sae-Jin's reaction was lukewarm at best. At that moment, she briefly wondered whether her worth had become insignificant all of a sudden.

“By the way, You should inquire with the related department’s head, instead of me, you know.” (Kim Sae-Jin)

“...Eh? No, that’s not... Well, I... uh, my appearance fee is \$27000 US, per episode...”

“Ah, really? Miss Sae-Jung’s is around \$23000, actually. It’s pretty close.”

With a sneaky smile on his face, Sae-Jin provoked Yu-Rin.

“Is, is that right? Only a \$4000 difference... Ah... However, I have not done much broadcasting work, that is why. So, if you allow me to sign up, then I give you my promise that I will work extra hard and widen the gap between me and Miss Sae-Jung...”

And so, she bit the bait rather beautifully.



The beginning of December, with the first snow still waiting to fall.

As soon as The Monster’s Society ranking rose up from B- to B when the success of its various business ventures were publicly acknowledged, suddenly from seemingly everywhere, several hostile attempts to keep its growth in check came forth.

Petty schemes such as endlessly delaying the issuing of business permits while nitpicking over nothing, issuing fines that ran up to millions of dollars on the grounds of not following the environmental protection laws, and even spreading false rumours of him speculating on real estate prices...

“Judging by the current circumstances, we strongly suspect that several large corporations and Trilogy have joined hands together, but... we can not be 100% certain.” (Jo Hahn-Sung)

And so, Sae-Jin ended up creating a dedicated response team. Somehow, he had developed a personality where he could not stand back and accept defeats.

“...Really? I understand. For now, let us wait until we can find more concrete evidence.”

But since getting angry was akin to admitting that he had lost, Sae-Jin maintained as much level-headedness as humanly possible.

“But you’re certain that Trilogy is involved?”

“Yes, sir. There is evidence of one of that Society’s directors lobbying the related parties.”

It was most likely that Trilogy didn’t care for one bit about their stronghold on the top spot of South Korea’s Society rankings being threatened by anyone.

It was almost understandable as the mass media that loved to pit others for a juicy fight was already comparing the histories of both Trilogy and The Monster side by side so there was that, but still, what that Society had done was quite a dirty and cheap trick.

“Oh, and Mister Chairman, should we submit our Guild registration as well?”

“Yes, of course.”

A ‘Guild’. A law proposed half a year ago had went into effect just last week, finally establishing the concept of Guilds officially in the Republic of Korea.

In the layman’s terms, a Guild was the evolved form of a Society. A Society with a Class higher than B was given the chance to advance to a Guild, and after going through three months of complicated testing procedures and proving it can become a Guild without an issue, it would be officially recognised as one.

The First World countries in Western Europe, the United States as well as many other nations had already adopted this system, but Korea was only implementing it now due to several overlapping reasons.

In actual truth, The Monster’s contribution in getting this law enacted belatedly in Korea was great.

The backstory surrounding this law was like this:

The Dawn dynasty, which did not enjoy an amiable relationship with Trilogy for some reason, spent an exorbitant amount of money lobbying against the Guild system. The Dawn had already found Trilogy threatening, yet with the implementation of this system, they knew their enemy’s influence would only strengthen further.

It was then, a new Society co-founded by Yu Sae-Jung called The Monster entered into



the fray like a new star, which meant that it would be friendly towards the Dawn's interests. And so, the Dawn decided to divert the enormous lobbying funds to support the development of The Monster that would become the dark horse to oppose Trilogy.

The disappearance of the Dawn's lobbying efforts meant that the 'Guild Law' ended up smoothly passing with little trouble.

Obviously, there was no guarantee that The Monster would be able to become a Guild just because the law came into effect. First of all, many high ranking directors of the corporations unfriendly towards the Dawn were members of Trilogy as well, so it was likely that they would resort to even nastier and dirtier schemes from now on.

"And by the way, sir. There is one more item still left on the agenda."

"Another one? Hu-uh... Our people must be getting really busy nowadays, I'm guessing?"

The continuing parade of reports that lasted nearly three hours so far – Kim Sae-Jin rubbed his head which was getting dizzy from mental fatigue.

The administrative work for the Society had increased by that much.

The number of employees now easily exceeded three digits after he repeatedly hired new people due to the shortage of manpower. Three new departments were established, with each department now having on an average 23 employees, 4 times the size compared to only 3 months ago.

The annual budget set aside just for salaries was almost \$20 million, but just like he promised to himself, Kim Sae-Jin was not stingy when it came to spending on people.

The fact of his employees being treated well naturally spread around and so, when one of those rare opportunities to get hired by The Monster came around, CVs sent in by those working in the prominent local companies as well as famous overseas corporations could be found every now and then.

"Haha. It is quite alright, sir. The individually assigned sleeping quarters are better than some regular houses, so it's not much of a problem to pull an all-nighter for us."

"It can't be helped under the current circumstances as there are just too much work to go through, but as soon as things quieten down, please make sure to go home at the

correct time, please.”

“Yes, sir. I understand. And now, we need your decision on the technical department’s...”

Jo Hahn-Sung continued on with his report.



“Oppa, what are you thinking about now?”

“...Mm?”

Sae-Jin was currently with Yu Sae-Jung in a restaurant. Although the work was tough and he still felt dizzy, but he just couldn’t ignore the sad light in her eyes.

“Ah! You were thinking of Miss Kim Yu-Rin, right? I heard you had a meeting with her yesterday.”

As if her jealousy was kicking in again, Yu Sae-Jung’s lips pouted and her eyes narrowed to a slit.

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“That’s not true at all. It’s just that... I’m kinda tired today.”

As he had spent 4 hours out of 7 he could stay as a Human purely listening to reports, reading many documents and making decisions, it was understandable he would be exhausted by now.

“...Are you going home right away, even today?”

“Yeah. My bad.”

“And I’m still *forever* barred from going to Oppa’s place?”

“That’s par for the course, you know. You haven’t even graduated from a high school yet, but you want to go to a house of a man who lives alone...”

With a deeply sulking expression, Yu Sae-Jung began roughly chewing on the steak.

*Chomp, chomp.*

She resembled an angry puppy for some reason, so she didn't look all that threatening to him.

"...Ah! I just remembered. Oppa, would you like to come to my graduation ceremony?"

Even though they had agreed to address each other informally, she had this strange habit of using honorifics whenever she asked him for a favour.

"Mm? Isn't it usually the family members attending such things?"

Yu Sae-Jung smiled sadly at his question. He then quickly realised his mistake. If her family was going, then she'd not have the reason to invite him in the first place.

"My dad's too busy, my grandpa is also busy because it's the year-end, my divorced mom's whereabouts are unknown, and since I'm the only child, I don't have any siblings, you see. That's why there is no one to show up, except for you, Oppa."

She seemed calm, but Sae-Jin couldn't say anything after detecting a hint of sadness hidden in her voice.

"Will you... come?"

There was no need to delay his answer. As soon as he nodded his head...

"...Thank you."

Yu Sae-Jung looked into his eyes and smiled bravely. But Sae-Jin thought that smile looked lonely as well. That is why, he shifted his hand resting on top of the table and quietly held hers.

'Hell yeah!'

Meanwhile, she was inwardly shouting out in happiness.

There was indeed someone who could come to her graduation ceremony – the butler, Park Hyun-Oh. However, he would not be able to make it anymore.



“I’m thankful for everything you’ve done for me.” (Kim Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin and Yu Sae-Jung smiled as they looked at each other.

“You’re really thankful?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

It was a question with a hidden meaning.

When Sae-Jin tilted his head in confusion, Yu Sae-Jung sneakily approached his front. And then, not even giving him a chance to say no, she ambushed him with a tight embrace.

“...What the?”

“It’s a farewell hug. They all do in the West, you know. That’s why I... If you are really thankful, stay like this for a little while longer...”

Yu Sae-Jung leaned her head on his chest. Her fatigue and worries were all gone, just like that, and her mind became more comfortable. When she was in his arms, fully enjoying his pleasant scent with all her body... nothing in this world would be able to make her feel envious.

“Don’t just stand there... Oppa hug me too.”

She looked up at him with a gentle eyes.

Her affectionate eyes and sincere voice.

He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her in even tighter.



On the following day, Sae-Jin secretly summoned the ‘manager’ of the Mercenary Company, Kim Yu-Sohn. It was to discuss the deployment of 13 Mercenaries and 20 intelligence operatives affiliated with his Company.

“Of course, I’ll leave the direction of our future to your discretion, Mister Chairman.”

Kim Yu-Sohn smiled warmly.

Currently, The Monster Mercenary Company was being inundated with all the job requests coming in. First of all, there was only one properly organised Mercenary Company in the entire world which just so happened to be Sae-Jin's; so the fault of overwhelming workload laid with the inevitable obtainment of the title 'Best In The World'.

"Then, putting the Mercenary matters to a side for now, how goes the training of the intelligence operatives?"

"It's going well. They are training hard as we speak in techniques such as putting on disguise, moving in stealth as well as forging identity documents at The Monster Intelligence Agency's underground base constructed under your orders."

Calling it The Monster Intelligence Agency sounded a bit embarrassing and all that, but Sae-Jin really needed this organization right now.

"...Are they ready to enter real combat situations?"

"The six out of the twenty, those whom you have identified as 'Agents with rich golden auras' are now skilled enough for that purpose. And even though it's nominally a real combat situation, it's still nothing more than searching for the right hotels, sir, so I believe it should be good to give them this opportunity."

Forming his own intelligence gathering agency was without a doubt, very illegal, so he had to be extra careful. But still...

"Understood. Then, for the moment, have those six deployed to the field."

"Yes, sir."

Their aim was to find the hotel where the future ruler of the Vampires was hiding in. Hesitation was no longer an option.

# CHAPTER 73

## PREPARATION (2)

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There was only one suite on the top – 60th – floor of the Gangwon Province’s most luxurious hotel, ‘Romance of Dawn’. And to stay here even for one single night, an enormous fee was required, meaning this place would forever remain out of reach for the regular folks. *(TL: The author wrote the name of the hotel in actual English.)*

But currently, this top floor had transformed into a base camp solely to serve one person. Not just the 60th floor, either – the five floors below it, from 55th to 59th, as well. Hundreds of magic traps, detection spells, as well as numerous ‘Undeads’ hidden in the shadows were quietly waiting for potential visits from unwelcome intruders.

Although everything looked business as usual at a casual glance, it was in a way, a perfectly constructed fortress designed to kill any who dared to intrude.

“Are all the preparations ready?”

And the master of this ‘fortress’ was the possessor of the most noble bloodline, ‘Prillrani von Bathory’.

The last descendant of the House Bathory which was reputed to be the progenitor of the Vampire race, she was also seen as the most likely candidate to become the future empress of the race. On the covertly-operating Vampire community chat rooms, many lamented that if this Bathory girl was smart, no, if she had an ounce of desire in her to learn something new, then they may have went back home a long time ago.

“Yes, my lady. The preparations are almost complete. Although a few inferior races tried to delay us, starting from next week, we will be engaging in the ‘expulsion’ operation right away.”

This ‘expulsion’ was the term used for extracting Monsters hidden within the portal.

“Is that so. Very good.”

Bathory smiled gloomily.

“Ah. But what is ‘el Las’ doing right now? They still have not made any contacts yet.”

In the not too distant past, during the days of the mass racial extermination, the noble households were targeted the most; and only two managed to preserve their bloodlines from that chaos – ‘Bathory’ and ‘el Las’.

Of course, the power of the el Las household was comparably much weaker than that of the Bathory’s, and not to mention, their current leader was just a little kid but still, that family wasn’t some bad joke that could be safely ignored.

First of all, although the ‘Vampire Emperor’ was a mighty existence that ruled over all of Vampires, the thing was, in order to become one, he or she didn’t have to be the possessor of the strongest power or the smartest of brains.

“Those fools had tried to open a portal in the past, but after their efforts had gone down the drain, it looks like they are being mindful of us, we who have achieved success sooner than them, my lady. But if it’s not that, then perhaps, since their lord is too young, they may have a fear of being absorbed by us, instead.”

“Heu-Mm. Really? They have become cowards, haven’t they? How unfortunate. Why continue on living, if you’re going to exist like that?”

Bathory’s chilly question became a mysterious cold aura that embraced the male Vampire’s body.

“...You... you’re absolutely correct, my lady...”

“Oh, right. What about... those trash?”

Whenever Bathory thought about those inferior bastards she referred to as ‘trash’, the fury she repressed deep down in her heart tried to break free. The abominable remnants that were closer to Monsters than to Vampires – those vile *things* she’d like to exterminate even before the human race, if possible.

“Ahh... Those ‘trash’ have shown no signs of activity after holing themselves up within the ‘Sanctuary’ of late, but that only makes us more concerned, my lady.”

The ‘trash’, also known as ‘Nosferatu’.

Their bloodlines possessed excellent abilities but they were still categorised as

Monsters. And with the history of them betraying their own species in the distant past, Nosferatus were never acknowledged as the Vampire's kin that shared the same ancestors.

Known to be the most twisted and vile even among the Vampire species, these Nosferatus suffered from inferiority complex – or from victim mentality – and they carried out insidious plots regardless of who their targets were. That was why the majority of Vampires believed that the previous racial cleansing happened because the Nosferatus instigated humans to take actions.

What supported this notion was the fact that Nosferatus didn't suffer any fallout from the cleansing while countless Vampires and their noble bloodlines were killed; and now, they had grown to the point where they could legitimately challenge for the position of the Vampire Emperor.

"Haa... What are those accursed bastards scheming on now, I wonder..."

One of those trash as the emperor? What a nonsensical notion that was. Bathory's teeth gritted in fury.

"Chief Suterte seems to be cooking up some kind of a scheme, my lady, but... our spies lacked the capabilities to defeat those bastards. All our soldiers could find was the location of their Sanctuary and the living conditions inside."

"Heu-Mm. By the way, you haven't thought of any other plans besides taking them head-on, have you?"

"...P, pardon?"

"You didn't, did you?"

Bathory glared at the man as if he was a pathetic fool.

"Hey, you. Have you ever heard of a tactic where you don't use your own strength but use another party to destroy your enemies?"

When Bathory suddenly brought up a certain 'four-letter idiom' the guy became dazed for a short time. He was thinking, just when did this empty-headed girl who had never even touched a book in her life hit her head and come up an idea like this?!



“What is the meaning of your expression?! Are you perchance courting death?”

“No, no that’s not it, my lady! This servant does not know the meaning of those words so I was thinking carefully about it, I swear!”

Bathory’s head might be empty but she was supernaturally quick on the uptake, and the guy quickly planted his forehead on the ground to grovel before her.

“...Is that so? In that case, fine. I shall forgive you this time, since you didn’t know.”

She then proceeded to explain the meaning of her words as well as the historical origins of it. Of course, she got over half of it totally wrong, but the guy did not possess the necessary *cojones* to point that out.

“So, the thing is, I brought it up because... I learned it after watching TV a lot lately.”

A Bathory watched TV? The guy looked up at her with a slightly moved expression.

“You know Lycan, right? The bastard that goes around poking us with a stick. I heard that he has established his own Mercenary Company. On top of that, there’s a white tiger called Yu Baek-Song busy running around here in this country, right?”

“...Ahhh.”

The guy immediately figured it out. Of course, he could see a lot of holes in this plan, but still, he somehow managed to pull off the expression of how surprised he was at this method’s greatness.

“Instead of causing harm, wouldn’t those bastards disappearing at the same time help out with our plans?” (Prillrani von Bathory)

An eerie, yet pure grin drew up on Bathory’s lips.

“This servant understands. This servant shall use a pawn to lodge a job request to Lycan for the time being.”

“Very good. You may be dumb, but it’s good that your head works fast.”

Bathory smiled in satisfaction and waved her hand; then the man backtracked quickly and disappeared from her sight.



On 29th of December, three days before the end of the year.

Kim Sae-Jin went to speak to Hazeline.

“...A potion or a magic spell to suppress lust...?” (Hazeline)

This was his most pressing issue currently. The damn sexual desire that boiled at almost every opportunity, whether it was during training, sparring, speaking to Yi Hye-Rin, Yu Sae-Jung, or for that matter, any other women...

“Yes.”

Unfortunately, the Goblin’s knowledge base did not contain a recipe for such a potion. Probably it was par for the course, since Monsters didn’t have what one would call ‘reason’.

“Uhm... I haven’t heard of anything like that, either...” (Hazeline)

Hazeline took a glance at Sae-Jin’s current appearance and then, carefully pulled her clothes in tighter. When he looked at her as if he couldn’t believe what she was doing, Hazeline let out a fake cough.

“Keum, keum. Is it, uh, difficult to manage currently? That place... down there.”

“...Yes, it’s a little difficult.”

“Oh, if that’s the case, I’ll search for one. Since you can find all sorts of bizarre potions out there, there might be one like that.”

Hazeline pulled out a mini laptop.

“...Should I wait?”

“Mm? Nope. You don’t have to stick around if you’re busy right now. This might take some time, after all.”

Kim Sae-Jin nodded his head and stood up to leave.



*– Finally, the old year has passed and the new year begins~!!*

The noises of fireworks and bells loudly spread all around, signaling the beginning of the new year.

However, quite unlike the joyous laughters of everyone else, Kim Sae-Jin in his Ebony Wolf Form was going through a difficult dilemma at this very moment.

The cause was a certain alert window that rose up yesterday when he finished creating yet another ‘Dark Energy Link’.

[All conditions to evolve into the Lycanthrope has been satisfied. It’s now possible to evolve into the Lycanthrope.]

[Warning: A Lycanthrope is a Human but at the same time, a Monster. So if the host chooses to evolve, the Human Form and the Ebony Wolf Form will merge together. Other Monster Forms will remain the same.]

[The time available to stay as a ‘Human’ will increase to a minimum of 12 hours once evolved into the Lycanthrope. Depending on the numerical value of the Stat, ‘Energy Manipulation’, the length of the time available will increase further.]

“...Fuu...”

The Ebony Wolf Form and the Human Form merging together – that was the same thing as the Kim Sae-Jin of now disappearing forever.

He couldn’t make such a decision half-heartedly at all.

And he felt quite idiotic for believing that his evolution would solve all of his problems.

What a dilemma this was turning out to be.

As the time passed, the instincts of the Orc boiled over more and more, but he couldn’t

evolve just to solve this issue – because, he had no idea what would happen to the ‘human Kim Sae-Jin’. And even if he did evolve, then the instincts of Lycanthrope would become the next headache to overcome.

Obviously, the best answer in this situation was to grow the Human Form Kim Sae-Jin until he could contend with the Orc Great Warrior Form. Even that was proving problematic due to the boiling instincts of the Orc lately, as his base desires threatened to go out of control whenever he moved his body...

*\*SFX for a mobile phone ringing\**

He got distracted from the ever-deepening worries by the sound of the phone ringing. Frowning slightly, he glared at the LCD display.

<<<<

– Yu Sae-Jung.

“Ah, right.”

Her coming of age ceremony. He only remembered it now.

“...Ha-ahh...”

He sighed out grandly and answered the phone.

– *“Oppa~~ I’m finally an adult~~”*

“...Really? Congrats.”

Yu Sae-Jung’s voice sounded especially bright on the phone.

But with his thought process all messily tangled up, he could only find her slightly bothersome at the moment.



“...Under the Geumgang Mountain?”

6 o’clock in the evening. Before attending Yu Sae-Jung’s coming of age ceremony, Sae-

Jin stopped by at The Monster's HQ when Kim Yu-Sohn called him in hurry.

"That is correct. According to the anonymous tip, an underground base for Vampires can be found there. It's not verified yet but an evidence with strong persuasive power was enclosed together with the tip. Mister Chairman, shall we deploy our agents?"

Kim Sae-Jin studied the evidence provided. It was a bunch of photographs depicting an unidentified village constructed underground. A grey city where not a single ray of sunlight would be able to enter.

"...Does it look like the SID knows about this place?"

"It doesn't, no. If they knew, then they might have raised a ruckus. And in truth... the SID isn't going to exterminate these Vampires – you are well aware of this fact, I believe. Also, that is the reason why this anonymous tip provider requested us with this job and not the SID."

The tool Sae-Jin created and Yu Baek-Song's nose could sniff out a Vampire. However, humans caught in the high-level seduction magic of Vampires became pawns, not realising that they were under the influence of such magic.

"Fuu... I understand. Let me talk to Yu Baek-Song first. And as it's dangerous, delay the deployment of our agents for now."

"Yes sir. And Mister Chairman, I'd like the permission to track down this anonymous informant as well."

"The informant?"

Kim Yu-Sohn nodded his head.



Yu Sae-Jung's coming of age ceremony took place within the huge mansion of the Dawn household.

As expected of the Dawn, it truly was a grand banquet. It was not an exaggeration to say the true movers and shakers of Korea had all gathered here in this banquet hall – leaders of the politics and financial worlds, famous Knights and celebrities, etc, etc.

However, Yu Sae-Jung was nervously waiting for the arrival of one specific person.

“Hyun-Oh Oppa, Sae-Jin Oppa hasn’t arrived yet, right?”

“Yeah. He did call to say that he might be running a bit late, but promised to be here, so don’t worry.”

“...”

Yu Sae-Jung tightly shut her mouth. The main event of the ceremony had ended already. She had placed the hairstick in her hair now, and the people were too busy building profitable personal connections without a rest. *(TL: As far as I can tell, putting a hairstick means a girl is now officially an adult in the Korean tradition. Not sure how accurate this is, but there you go.)*

Definitely, without his presence here, this whole ceremony was a total waste of time for her.

“How do you do, Miss Yu Sae-Jung?”

The guy approaching her while carrying an oily smile was Kim Jong-Hyuk, the third son of the owner of the corporation that rivaled Dawn, the Great Wisdom.

He was a loser well known for his unchecked, wild behaviour and his current appearance of trying to look all important and grown-up seemed rather pathetic to Yu Sae-Jung.

“Hello.”

At Sae-Jung’s terse reply, Kim Jong-Hyuk’s eyebrows went into a slight spasm. However, he continued on with his words, not looking perturbed at all.

“It seems that *person* is not attending your coming of age ceremony? As there were stories of him being in a special relationship with Miss Sae-Jung, I was really looking forward to meeting him here today. I even heard a rumour that you two exited a car together late at night, even. Of course, I also hear that person for some reason is refusing to go all the way.”

This time, it was Yu Sae-Jung’s face to harden. She wondered just who the heck invited this son of a bi\*ch. She felt like blaming her dad who insisted on sending invitations to

everyone out of common courtesy.

“You can keep your unnecessary remarks to yourself as he will come. Don’t you worry.”  
(Yu Sae-Jung)

“Hmph. I’m sure that he’s very busy nowadays. I mean, everyone’s heard of the rumour that both his Trait and his business acumen is simply extraordinary.”

As The Monster’s value continued to soar higher, the world praised Sae-Jin’s abilities.

Of course, all he had done was to ‘only’ recruit those people with overflowing potential and create an environment where these folks could fully unleash their strengths.

The true reason for The Monster’s continued advancement was the countless employees who had become the pillars of his Society, as they thoroughly displayed their sharp intuition and excellent abilities with the aid of the encouraging environment.

But whether a business was successful or not, it was the chairman of the company who always came under the spotlight. That was why, before anyone knew it, Sae-Jin had become the genius businessman the attention of the people of Korea was focused on.

“...I too am well aware of that. Even if he’s a bit late in coming, I’m still grateful.”

“Oh? But you seemed rather... very anxious for that. Maybe I saw it all wrong?”

When Kim Jong-Hyuk mouthed the words of clear ridicule, Sae-Jung clenched both of her fists and breathed out angrily.

But this guy opened up his mouth again before she could calm herself down.

“How unfortunate. I wanted to converse with him at least once. But it looks like he may never show up...”

Yu Sae-Jung gritted her teeth.

But it was then.

The huge doors of the banquet hall suddenly swung open.

# CHAPTER 74

## PREPARATION (3)

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Through the abruptly-opened gaps of the banquet hall's doors, a man made his entrance.

The elegant and smooth tuxedo that perfectly wrapped around his tall and athletic physique; the neat and tidy hair combed upwards to accentuate his manly countenance; the sharp eyes and facial features reminding one of a wolf.

After searching around the banquet hall, he found Yu Sae-Jung and then he began to slowly walk up towards her. As he took step after step, getting closer and closer, her cheeks became redder and redder.

"Sae-Jung."

Finally stopping before her, Kim Sae-Jin smiled deeply as they gazed at each other.

"I'm sorry for being a bit late."

His charming baritone voice seemed to reverberate through the banquet hall, making her to dazedly nod her head.

"Is everything over already?" (Kim Sae-Jin)

"Eh? N, no... not yet. It hasn't ended yet..."

Even though she had known him for the past year or so, this was the very first time she saw him wear a tuxedo like this.

Maybe that was the problem – she just couldn't get used how cool he looked today and her eyes hurriedly lowered to the floor in bashfulness.

"Oh-ho. So you are that famous Mister Kim Sae-Jin?"

After watching the two interact with much interest, Kim Jong-Hyuk reached out for a handshake.



“I’m Director Kim Jong-Hyuk from the Great Wisdom Electronics.”

“Oh. Hello, pleased to meet you. I’m Kim Sae-Jin.”

While shaking hands, Sae-Jin checked out this guy’s disposition with the Eyes of the Wolf. And almost immediately, he nearly ended up taking a big step back. A powerfully turbid and dark energy was oozing out from this man, Kim Jong-Hyuk. Sae-Jin hadn’t seen the colour this dark before until now.

“Hahaha. Now that I have met you in person, you look much more handsome than in those videos and photographs.”

Kim Jong-Hyuk yapped on and on, but Sae-Jin didn’t want to spend another minute with this guy, if he could help it. So, he was about to ignore this Jong-Hyuk person and have a chat with Yu Sae-Jung, when...

“Uh~ Isn’t this a pleasant surprise! Aren’t you the last born son of the Great Wisdom Corporation’s owner?”

“Ohh, it’s good to see you again, Cabinet Minister! It’s been a while.”

...People began gathering around Sae-Jin. These guys used Kim Jong-Hyuk as an excuse to make their approach, and to build a friendly connection with Sae-Jin, began paying the obligatory lip service.

But maybe this was the case of ‘birds of a feather flocking together’ or ‘touching a pitch will get a man filthy’, every single one gathered here had their moral compass leaning heavily towards the side of evil. Of course, none of them were as bad as Kim Jong-Hyuk, but still.

“So, this gentleman here is that famed Mister Kim Sae-Jin, yes? How do you do. I’m the Minister in charge of the Home Affairs...”

“Why, yes. Hello to you too, sir. By the way, who is that next to you?”

Sae-Jin, who had become the centre of attention in this crowd, inexplicably pointed at the secretary of the man who just introduced himself as a government minister. It was because this young man was too talented and good natured to be next to this dirty bastard.

“Ah, his name is Kim Ho-Hyung. He’s my secretary but the kid’s not all that smart. He’s the son of a servant who has been working for me for a long time. Under the pretext of promising him a good future, I’m taking him along with me.”

When the nameless government minister let out a guffaw, the rest of the crowd began laughing as well. All of it were as fake as a laugh could get.

Kim Sae-Jin no longer wished to stay here. He slightly turned his head and checked out Yu Sae-Jung’s mood.

She seemed to have the exact same thoughts as he did, as she nodded her head slightly.

“Oh. But I’m suffering from slight migraine at the moment. Maybe because I’ve been swarmed with work lately...” (Kim Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin started feigning illness while massaging his head.

“Haha. That’s all very understandable. Nowadays, there isn’t any business sector The Monster hasn’t entered yet, after all. Even His Excellency have spoken about it as well.” (The minister)

“When you say ‘His Excellency’, you mean...”

“Of course, it’s Mister President, who else could it be?”

While they were busy yapping and laughing by themselves, Sae-Jin searched his inner pocket and pulled out something that gleamed under the light.

It was a ‘business card’ with the words [Kim Sae-Jin, The Society Chairman, The Monster] engraved on it. But it was no ordinary card. Made by flattening pure gold as thinly as possible, each one of these cards cost as much as \$650.

Sae-Jin made these not because he wanted to show off, but only after deciding to give them only to those people who might be of some help, and those who could help him out in the future.

“Oh-ho? And what could that be?” (Unnamed minister)

There were signs of avarice twinkling in the eyes of the minister who had caught the sight of this business card.

“It’s a business card.”

“Aha. So that’s your card. I also saw it once in a newspaper. I heard that you don’t give that to just anyone... But, is that really made out of pure gold?”

The government minister, under the false impression that he was the recipient of the card, triumphantly straightened his back.

“Yes, it is pure gold.”

The surrounding gallery of people let out an exclamation of admiration while gazing at the business card.

The minister let out a fake cough, and while tidying up the outline of his tie, he eagerly waited for the card to enter his hand.

“Sir, I’m envious,” said Kim Jong-Hyuk, humouring the unnamed minister with a fake smile. The minister reciprocated with a spirited chuckle.

“Huhuhuh. As expected of the most outstanding young man of his generation, you have good eyes for people.”

But, right next moment...

Kim Sae-Jin handed the card over not to the government minister, but to his secretary standing a slight distance away from the crowd.

“What is your name?” (Kim Sae-Jin)

“...Eh? Excuse me?”

“Your name. Or do you have a business card of your own?”

“Ahh... My name is Kim Ho-Hyung. I, I don’t have a business card...”

Sae-Jin nodded his head and placed his gold card in this person’s hand.

“You should give me a call later.” (Kim Sae-Jin)

After saying these words, Sae-Jin left the banquet hall only after 20 minutes had

passed.

“ .. ”

The minister dumbfoundedly followed the back of Sae-Jin, before viciously staring at the golden business card in Kim Ho-Hyung's hands.

It wasn't all that difficult to read his intentions within that gaze, but Ho-Hyung just quietly pocketed the card inside his suit.

“This... this son of a mere servant is...”

The minister stared at his secretary with eyes that could kill.

Unfortunately for him, he could not display any more of his anger in front of these many people.



Sae-Jin was planning to go home after he escaped the banquet hall, but he just couldn't ignore the pleading eyes of Yu Sae-Jung who had followed him outside.

“What is it? Is there a place you want to go?” (Kim Sae-Jin)

“I want to go to Oppa's place.”

“ .. ”

He gripped the steering wheel of his car tightly while glaring at her.

“What's wrong? I can't go anywhere else while wearing this dress, anyway. It'll be too embarrassing...”

Yu Sae-Jung spoke while slightly lifting the hems of her dress. As his cheeks blushed a little at the exposure of her white skin underneath, Sae-Jin checked the time remaining for his Human Form.

3 hours, 3 minutes and 59 seconds.

However, in three hours, it'd be midnight and the time remaining would reset to the

beginning.

In other words, there was plenty of time left.

“I’m an adult who went through a coming of age ceremony now... Can’t we just enjoy dinner together?”

Yu Sae-Jung didn’t miss the opening created when he was in a dilemma, and gently wrapped her hand over his.



“Wow. It’s so neat and tidy.”

Finally entering Sae-Jin’s home that she had dreamed about, her eyes went completely round as she took in the layout of the interior.

“I’m telling you this again, you are going back to your place for sleep. Got it?”

“Argh. I got it already. I’m not Cinderella, you know... When it’s past the midnight, I’ll leave even if you beg me not to.”

She took a quick glance at Sae-Jin, and then sat down on the living room’s couch.

“It’s really soft and comfortable. What are you doing, Oppa? Don’t just stand there and take a seat right here.”

Yu Sae-Jung vigorously patted on the empty space right next to her. Sae-Jin approached her with slightly awkward steps.

“Ta-dah!!”

As soon as he sat down, she proudly presented the paper bag she’d been carrying since before climbing into his car.

“What is that?”

“It’s alcohol.”

“...Huh?”

Sae-Jin's forehead creased in that moment, but Yu Sae-Jung's smiles only grew even brighter.



One hour after the drinking began suddenly.

The bottle of hard liquor with the alcohol content of 57% was already quite empty.

"...Really, Oppa iss jusst too~ much. Oppa, do ya kno' why eiii wanted that ce-re-mo-ny on 1st January?"

Yu Sae-Jung, with her face bright red, let out a grand sigh. She had drank so much, even her breath smelled thickly of alcohol now.

"Oppa also kno', right? How much I like Oppa. There'sss no waaay you don't kno'. Noooo waaay... Me. Oppa ev'ryday sings and siiings, 'adult, adult!!' soo, I gotta haves that adult ceremony on January first..."

"It's time for you to go home. Let me drive you there."

"Will ya jussst listen, till the end. Me don kno' why I like Oppa also... kyakk!!"

Kim Sae-Jin snatched away the glass from her hand. As if she got irritated by that, Yu Sae-Jung clenched her fist and lightly hit his chest.

"Eii! I'm not going home! Imma live here forever!! It's sooo irritatin' when ya pretend to not notice it, so Imma gonna live here."

"Fuu..."

This time, it was Kim Sae-Jin's turn to let out a sigh.

This couldn't go on. He needed to send her home now, so there would be no regrets later.

So, he stood up first.

"Me, I really did everything Oppa asked me for, and I helped out every time Oppa asked me. You don't have any idea how much I begged my dad and grandpa, do you? Oppa,

without me... Eek!"

"Let's go."

He pulled her up by her wrist.

Strangely enough, she didn't offer much resistance.

And so, leaving the living room and entering the cold passageway...

"Oppa."

A weak voice came from his back. Sae-Jin turned around to see why.

Right at that moment, Yu Sae-Jung slapped away his hand holding her wrist with all her power.

And then, she wrapped her arms around his neck in order to...

*"...\*groans in difficulty\*"*

...She tried to kiss him.

Unfortunately for her... she was just too short.

His 185 cm and her 160 cm. The difference of 25 cm couldn't be overcome even with her standing on tiptoes.

"...Damn it."

It was supposed to be an unexpected counterattack. On the verge of tears, she ended up planting her lips on his neck instead.

"You know, right...? That I like Oppa a lot. That's why... Can you like me back?"

She then confessed her ardent and sincere feelings for him.

"Even if Oppa doesn't feel the same way, it's okay. I, I can wait."

The emotions contained within those wet eyes were so desperately sad and pitiful.

It was Kim Sae-Jin's turn to act next.

Already, half of his reasoning had been thrown out the window. He powerfully held the back of Yu Sae-Jung's neck and began to seek out her lips with his own. However, this action wasn't about conveying the emotions of love at all. It was rough. Very rough. So much so, the words 'trying to appease his lust' described it perfectly.

"Eup... Heup..."

At Kim Sae-Jin's rough hands, hem of her dress got ripped up.

Yu Sae-Jung became fearful of his sudden transformation.

"Oppa, wait... Eu-eup!"

But he continued. His tongue roughly roamed within her mouth, and his hands stroked her body with equally rough force.

Before she knew it, a single tear formed on the corner of Yu Sae-Jung's eyes.

She was scared.

<<<<

Of course, if she wanted to refuse him, then she could. Mana had this effect of removing the alcohol's influence from one's system. But still... what if Kim Sae-Jin hated her for pushing him away?

That made her scared.

"Ahhh."

Thanks to her tears, Kim Sae-Jin could somehow regain his reasoning.

He saw the torn pieces of her dress on the floor, and Yu Sae-Jung who was now practically half naked.

"...I... I'm sorry."

He grabbed his head and turned away from her.



He found himself so damn pathetic.

Even though he knew things might end up like this, he still let her into his home.

But, seeing himself still blaming the instincts of the goddamn Monsters... he felt so cheap and pathetic.

“...No, no, I’m just...” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Strangely, it was Yu Sae-Jung who was taken back.

She dazedly stared at his back as he stood there in torment, before slowly approaching him and hugged his broad back.

“I’m fine.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Sae-Jin showed no reaction.

“I just got surprised, that’s all.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

She held his waist even tighter.

“Then... I’ll go home now. We’ll just talk again tomorrow. Just Please remember what I said... Ah. It doesn’t have to be tomorrow. Whenever you are ready.”

Her arms around his waist slipped away.

“I really like Oppa. This kind of emotion, I’ve never felt anything like it before in my life.”

She left behind the most important confession of all, and then left his house.



2 days later.

“There are two types of warriors out there – the orthodox type, and the instinctive type.”

The current location was The Monster’s training facility.

Kim Sae-Jin was receiving a personalised training from a Knight invited from the Raven Order.

“The orthodox types are as the word suggests – they faithfully follow the prescribed guidelines of their chosen martial art schools. There are many ‘Sects’ in this path, but currently, the highest rated one is the Sect founded by the Raven Order Master Kim Hyun-Seok, ‘Hyunseo’ Sect which is based on his Trait.”

A serious sparring with a strong Knight caused an unbelievable increase in the various Skills’ Proficiency percentage, so he was holding this session precisely in order to increase his Human Form’s capabilities and overall Skill Levels.

“And the famous Knights who follow this Sect’s teachings are Miss Kim Yu-Rin, the Highest Tier Knight from our Order, and myself, the High Tier Knight Jin Yi-Hahn.”

The Knight who introduced himself as Jin Yi-Hahn spoke proudly.

“And the so-called instinctive types are the ones that fully rely on their instincts and senses. The famous example of this type is the Order Master of the Dawn, Mister Yu Soo-Hyuk. From what I hear from Miss Yi Hye-Rin, you also seem to fall into this category as well, Mister Chairman.”

Sae-Jin nodded his head. Even though Passive Skills played a role, the basis of the battle style he had adopted was him simply swinging his weapons based on his instincts and his senses.

“Well, then. Let’s start with a simple test of your abilities.”

Jin Yi-Hahn’s expression turned into admiration as he traced the surface of the practice blade with his fingertips. Even though it was simply for practising, this weapon was already on the level of a High Quality item.

“...Is it possible for me to take one of these practice weapons home with me?” (Jin Yi-Hahn)

“Hm? Ah, yes. Do as you wish.”

“Thank you.”

Jin Yi-Hahn quickly bowed his head.

“Well, then. Please attack with everything you have.”



The clashings of practice swords had become somewhat intense, but its end was quite simple in nature.

*\*SFX for strong gust of wind\**

Jin Yi-Hahn’s last sword attack left behind razor-sharp tempest winds as it sliced Sae-Jin’s own weapon in half. And upon receiving the impact, Sae-Jin ended up rolling over backwards on the floor. It was a clear demonstration of a gap in their power. As expected, a High Tier Knight was something else entirely.

“You are quite amazing.” (Kim Sae-Jin)

“No, no. That’s what I’d like to say about you.”

Jin Yi-Hahn approached Sae-Jin and offered his hand. Even though he was defeated here, Sae-Jin still felt deeply satisfied as he grabbed the offered hand and stood up.

[Warrior’s Special Quality – Proficiency Level: 98.99%]

From this sparring session alone, the Proficiency had risen as much as 3% in one go, that was why.

“Although you can’t use Mana, with this level of abilities, I believe you can defeat a Mid Tier Knight quite easily.”

“Do you really think so?”

“Yes.”

Jin Yi-Hahn smiled.

‘Then, that’s a relief.’

With that little left, he’d be able to upgrade ‘Warrior’s Special Quality’ to another level

before the advent of the Red Moon. He had no clue just what kind of effect would be added, but well, surely it should prove useful to him regardless.

“Ah. Miss Yu Sae-Jung is waiting for you over there.”

Jin Yi-Hahn pointed towards the entrance of the training facility and spoke.

And the brightly smiling Yu Sae-Jung was there, busy waving her hand over here.



Two days later.

From the early morning hours, urgent messages poured out from the TV news.

– *The signs of the Red Moon have been detected and it's expected that in three days...*

It was to deliver the news of the omen of the Red Moon's impending manifestation being detected.

The Red Moon.

As the term suggested, the moon itself became dyed in blood red. This event that the modern science could not find the cause of, was a calamity that befell on this planet every five to six years.

The moonlight, dyed in blood red colour for unknown reasons, amplified the Monsters' aggressiveness and powers much higher compared to normal.

And that was why a week before the Red Moon begins, a state of emergency would be declared all around the world; every Knight, Hunter and Wizard would come under the respective government's command and prepare themselves to battle this event.

But especially for someone like Kim Sae-Jin, it was the same as the Red Moon exceeding far past the level of a mere calamity and straight into apocalypse.

Actually, the person who reported the advent of Red Moon was Kim Sae-Jin.

– *The legendary Mercenary, the Lycan, is the first person to discover the signs; he reported to the Ministry of Defense after allegedly sensing very faint changes within the*

*clear sunlight. The citizens are praising the Lycan for detecting this global calamity beforehand...*

With a spooky timing, the news anchor was mentioning the story of the Red Moon as well. He momentarily got confused, thinking that he was looking at an alert window that said, [The fame of the Lycan has risen.]

Whatever the case may have been, the only reason why Sae-Jin could become the first person in the world to detect the Red Moon was...

[Warning: The Eyes of the Wolf has detected the signs of the Red Moon!! Under the influence of the Red Moon, the time limit for the Human Form will decrease to only 10% of the usual time.]

It was thanks to this alert window.

The meaning behind those words, his Human time being reduced to only 10% of the usual available time – he could only exist as a human for around 45 minutes per day. It was too much of a risk to stay in the human society like that.

And so, Sae-Jin made a decision.

It'd be better to simply live and grow stronger inside the Monster field of Gangwon Province and at the same time, he might as well investigate the hidden base of Vampires near the Geumgang Mountain. That was his decision.

“Water, canned food, potions, a tent...”

He shoved all the items he would need for his survival during this season of the Red Moon inside the Expanding Pocket.

He had already left Jo Hahn-Sung in charge, temporarily at least, of the administration of the Society. And as for Yu Sae-Jung – as their relationship had become complicated thanks to that day's kissing... he somehow was able to succeed in persuading her.

“It's done. Eu-ssaya!!”

Sae-Jin lifted up the Expanding Pocket that was packed with 300 kg worth of stuff, and

left his home.

# CHAPTER 75

## RED MOON (1)

---

Standing right before the Monster field, Sae-Jin pulled out his mobile phone for the final time for the day.

Before he knew it, there were over 100 phone numbers saved in his lists of contacts. He first called Jo Hahn-Sung, then Soh Yeo-Jin, Joo Ji-Hyuk, Yi Hye-Rin, Kim Yu-Sohn in that order to say hello and then...

“Hello?”

– *“... What do you want now?”*

...He called Yu Baek-Song next. Maybe because she was hassled by Sae-Jin’s frequent calls, there was a definite trace of a groan hidden in her voice.

“No, well. I just want to find out if you’re well today.”

– *“... Yeah, I’m fine...”*

*...If it wasn’t for you.*

Sae-Jin thought he heard her whisper quietly in the background there, but decided to ignore that for now.

“But hey, aren’t you being just a bit unfair? Haven’t your accomplishments been very good because of us? Like, predicting the Red Moon and all that.”

Around a week ago, Sae-Jin sent the word into the SID that the Lycan had detected the signs of the Red Moon. And so, the SID performed an in-depth investigation and with the proper proof uncovered, contacted the relevant government entities.

In other words, although the first one to detect the signs was the Lycan, it was the SID who had unearthed the actual evidence. From what Sae-Jin heard, the government acknowledged the efforts of the SID, which in turn restored the lost trust in the organization and on top of that, they were even given performance-based bonuses as

well.

So, wasn't her attitude just a bit too cold?

– *“No way. You’re not being a bother. On the contrary, I’m glad to talk to you.”*

Only then, Yu Baek-Song's voice forcibly became a bit lighter.

– *“But what do you want now? Why did you call me? I told you last time that the investigation of your parents’ matters is being done discreetly in order to avoid detection, didn’t I?”*

“It's not about that this time... What is your thoughts regarding the information we handed over to you before?”

He handed over the information about Vampires hiding in the Geumgang Mountain only to Yu Baek-Song. At the time, she promised to make a decision on it soon, but even after two weeks later, she was still keeping the result of her decision to herself only.

– *“That thing... I’ll let you know later. My head’s gonna split in half just trying to figure it out alone.”*

“Really?”

– *“Yeah. Sorry.”*

“...Well, I understand. But both Lycan and I are planning to look into this matter by ourselves later on. If the results seem certain, will you cooperate with us then?”

Yu Baek-Song didn't reply immediately and hesitated for a bit.

“Your answer?”

When Sae-Jin egged her on, Yu Baek-Song's powerless voice came out of the receiver. Her answer was out of his expectations.

– *“..... Hey, by the way, like, what if I get fired? I mean, I’m already being suspected of doing something funny by myself already...”*

“...Pardon?”



– *“No, well. When giving me this information, you told me to keep it to myself only. Did you know by doing that, I’m breaking the law? I’ve sworn to submit any new information regarding the affairs of this country to my superior officer, the President, you see.”*

Her voice was trembling.

– *“I said this to you before, right? There are people in higher positions than me. That information you gave me, if it’s true then it will be classified as ‘above top secret’. That means, without the permission of the President, I am not even allowed to have a say in it.”*

“Will you be fired if you move without permission?”

– *“Obviously!!”*

Yu Baek-Song shouted out. Kim Sae-Jin remained slightly dumbfounded for a moment, before chuckling out gently.

“I understand. If that’s the case, then don’t try to stand out too much. But if something happens and Miss Yu Baek-Song loses her job, then I’ll hire you, as the new leader of The Monster Mercenary Company. And I’ll pay you ten times the current annual salary.”

– *“... Huh?!”*

“So, don’t worry too much. Your reputation might suffer just a tad, but I promise to restore it to what it was once before by whatever means necessary.”

Even after Sae-Jin finished with his words, Yu Baek-Song remained silent for a long time. And this silence continued on for another five minutes or so.

And finally...

– *“... Don’t need it. So, that’s that. I’ll call you when I find new info regarding your mother.”*

With that, she hung up.

Afterwards, Sae-Jin called up Yu Sae-Jung and Kim Yu-Rin for the last time and then infiltrated into the interior of the Monster field.



Originally, Sae-Jin planned to stay in whatever cave he could find in the Monster field, but as he walked around, he suddenly got curious – curious about just how much progress the Orc pair of male and female he took under his wings around two months ago had made.

Since he heard the news of those two ‘Hero’ Orcs helping out the Knights in a battle against Monsters three days ago, he knew for sure they weren’t dead yet.

If that was the case, then it made more sense to stay in that village for the next ten days or so. Even if it was living amongst the Monsters, there was a good chance his life would be more convenient as there would be creatures willing to serve him in that place.

With that line of thought, he began wandering in the Monster field for 30 minutes.

Fortunately, Sae-Jin didn’t get lost and could find the steep cliff just over yonder.

He changed the direction of his feet towards where the strong smell of the Orcs was coming from.

“Wah?”

It was probably because he was currently in his Orc Great Warrior Form, but as he approached the village, the firmly-shut mud gates were slowly opening up.

And from the opening of the gates, he could hear a noisy commotion. At first, it sounded like cries of beasts, and then, also sounded like that of people welcoming him.

He slowly walked past the mud gates.

“Gua-gua!!”

The male Orc greeted him first. The changes in its physique was easy to spot – its hair was longer now, and its muscles were even more tougher as well.

Sae-Jin patted the head of the Orc which was only about a single handspan shorter than he was, and took a long look at the surroundings.

There were 21 offsprings of the two Orcs here. Now normally, an Orc needed around four months in order to reach full maturity so these ones were still of smaller stature but mysteriously, they all possessed blue skins.

That was because when Sae-Jin was tattooing the Orcs, he also added another effect – ‘genetic inheritance’. When he spent so much effort to strengthen the parents, it’d be no good whatsoever if the offsprings were weak and thus lack the potential to grow stronger in the future.

“...Very good.”

Nodding in satisfaction, he then moved his feet to build himself a place to dwell.

And behind his broad, dependable back, a couple dozen Orcs followed.



“They said that the Red Moon will rise tomorrow.”

Hearing the report of the subordinate Knight, Kim Yu-Rin looked up at the night sky with determined eyes. The full moon’s colour was still white and the sky was painted in dark navy blue.

However, when that moon becomes dyed in the colours of blood, then the whole world would also be bathed in red.

“Understood. And the government’s plan is?”

“They have set up the 1st line of defense within the interior of the Monster field, miss.”

“Within the interior?”

Kim Yu-Rin’s brows narrowed as she tried to figure out the reason. Obviously, by setting up the defensive line within the Monster field, there was the advantage of reducing the amount of area they need to, well, defend.

However, if a part of that line became compromised, the risk was equally high that a situation would occur where the defense force became surrounded by the Monsters flooding past the breach.

“Yes, ma’am. However, the position isn’t too deep within the field, so it looks like you don’t have to be concerned.”

“Give me the map.”

“Here it is.”

She carefully studied the map in front of her.

But she found a strange place on it. On a certain corner of the defensive line, around a cliff formed by the upheaval of the earth not too long ago, there she saw big red letters ‘area of interest’ written over this mysterious location.

“...What is that all about?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“Oh. That is the village of the Hero Orc. The location was discovered about a month ago, but as we can’t predict what kind of actions these Orcs would take under the effect of the Red Moon, that location has been classified as an area to keep an eye out for.”

“We can’t predict that?”

“Yes, ma’am. The tactical plan will change accordingly to whether those Orcs fight with us even under the crimson moonlight, or lose their reasoning and revert back to being pure Monsters.”

Kim Yu-Rin fell into a deep thought, her fingers tracing the scabbard of her sword.

What a contradictory thing to say, a Monster losing its reasoning. After all, a Monster didn’t even have the capacity to reason, to begin with.

But the Monster that shattered this notion did appear not too long ago.

A new type of Orc, the so-called ‘Hero Orc’. This somewhat embarrassing nickname wasn’t given to it just by the public – the scientific name printed on the Monster Bestiary used around the world was ‘Hero Orc’ as well.

Seen as a new, separate genus of the Orc family, people started calling these Orcs with the moniker ‘Hero’ ever since they roared out loudly and rushed in to help out the Knights in danger. Also, as these branch of Orcs was first discovered in the Republic of Korea, sometimes they were referred to as the Korean Orcs as well.

“Are the higher-ups thinking of utilising these Orcs as another defensive wall if they start helping humans out just like before?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“Yes, ma’am. It seems that way.”

“...Hmm.”

She wasn’t 100% certain about this, but if things indeed happen like that, then those Orcs would be wonderful allies to have.

<<<<

Kim Yu-Rin recalled the battle prowess of the Orc Great Warrior who fought the Basilisk alongside her in the past, then nodded her head.

“We’ll enter the Monster field with our company of Knights. Has the frontlines been constructed yet, via cutting down and burning away the forest?”

“Yes, ma’am. Not only the physical barricades, Wizards prepared safe living areas by preparing magical barriers and watchtowers.”

“Good.”



While Kim Yu-Rin and countless other Knights were tightening up their defenses in preparation for the Red Moon.

[The Skill ‘Warrior’s Special Quality’ has risen up a level.]

[A new property, ‘Mana-friendly Body’, has been acquired.]

Through constant hunting, Sae-Jin finally unlocked the next stage of the ‘Warrior’s Special Quality’ skill.

But that wasn’t all.

[The new property 'Mana-friendly Body' is reacting to the Form-specific Skill 'Ruler of the Water' of the Feeble Sea Monster Form!] [The property has been upgraded to 'Mana Body'.] *(TL: Yes, it's really called Mana Body. The author used different Hanja words for this skill and for the Mana-friendly Body, but they literally mean the same thing...)*

['Mana Body'] [Skill Proficiency 0.01%]

- A body that is extremely friendly towards Mana.
- Depending on the current Proficiency Level, there is a probability of negating the effects of Mana and/or magic spells of another that comes in contact with the host's body.
- Depending on the current Proficiency Level, the host can manipulate the Mana stored in the body according to the wishes of the host. Can be activated concurrently with other Skills.
- When the Proficiency Level reaches 100%, a new property will be unlocked.

"Hmm..."

Sae-Jin sat down on the dead body of the Ogre he just killed, and began checking out this new Mana Body thingy.

'I can manipulate Mana as I want to.'

It sure was one of the most welcoming alert windows he'd yet seen. After all, he had never received tutelage on how to use Mana and also, he didn't know how to make Mana move in his body, even.

"...Hmm."

However, he wasn't quite sure of what to do now.

For now, he stretched his arm out and clenched his fist tightly. But well, he didn't see any strange reaction, nor did he feel anything weird either.

"Hmm?"

This time, he focused his eyes on one point. He did that until his eyeballs became bloodshot, but again, nothing much happened.

“Hmm...”

Kim Sae-Jin sat there imitating a parrot for a while, but then figured out how to use it from an unexpected viewpoint.

‘Since it said ‘according to my wishes’, does that mean Mana’ll move if I think about it? But isn’t that a bit different from what I heard before?’

‘Mana through one’s wishes’ – that wasn’t the fundamental law of Mana Utilisation the Knights and Wizards adhered to. They said that they moved the Mana flowing in their blood vessels ‘physically’ and then expel it out of their bodies. If Mana can be moved around with nothing but some simple thoughts, then why would the professions of Knights and Wizards be seen as highly specialised and valuable?

‘If I just think of making Mana rise out of my arm, then... ’

...And from his arm, thick Mana rose up.

*“\*Cries of fright, Orc style\*”*

Kim Sae-Jin got genuinely surprised and ended up tumbling over backwards.

“What the hell!!”

Sae-Jin quickly shot back to his feet and shouted at the Mana wavering around his arm.

Controlling Mana with nothing but his thoughts – he’d never even heard of such a nonsense before.

*Gulp.*

He swallowed his saliva down and sent in a thought towards this Mana.

Simple thoughts such as ‘grow in width; grow in length; go lower’, as well as...

‘Turn into flames.’

*Hwareureuk-*

On the empty air where Mana was undulating, a sudden spark of fire began and started burning up.

‘Turn into dirt.’

The flame burning up in the middle of the air then became brown soil and fell on the ground.

‘Turn into snow.’

Pure white snowflakes began to fall slowly.

‘Turn into a sword.’

[The Skill Proficiency must be over 50% in order to activate this skill concurrently with the Skill ‘Orc’s Smithing Technique’.]

It was not possible for now, but as soon as his Proficiency has increased...

“Wow...”

He could only admire this new property in daze.

As expected, there was a reason why this new thing was classified as ‘property’ instead of ‘skill’.



# CHAPTER 76

## RED MOON (2)

---

The defensive perimeter of the Knights against the Red Moon had been completed, near the location where Sae-Jin was.

He found this out via the mobile phone he brought along from home.

‘Wait a second here. Will these Orcs be alright?’

He became worried about the influence of the Red Moon, all of a sudden. He figured that depending on which one had a higher degree of influence – his Skills or the Red Moon – the Orcs would act accordingly. However, this Red Moon was a wide-scale calamity that caused Monsters to go completely wild. Could these Orcs possibly withstand such disaster?

“...Bring the remaining Orcs to me.”

The powerful baritone voice of Kim Sae-Jin the Orc Great Warrior spread around like a wave.

And then, with the exception of four agile Orcs that were sent out to the Geumgang Mountain as scouts, the Orcs in the village all promptly gathered where he was.

“Ev’ryburdy iss heer, oh, Great War-ier.”

“.....”

The Orc in charge spoke. Sae-Jin’s forehead creased just a little. He was kind of regretting giving this guy the Passive ‘Vocal Cord Reconstruction’ now. He only did it to make communication a bit easier, but seriously, the combination of the Orc’s ugly face and that short-tongued pronunciation of words was creeping the hell out of him.

“Enter.”

He assumed the Goblin Form and began inscribing Magic Tattoos on the Orcs, one at a time. The base ingredient used was his own blood; the effect imbued would be simple

– ‘resistance to magic’, to endure the influence of the Red Moon.

The Goblin’s Craftsmanship skill was now at B+, and it only took just over a minute to tattoo a single Orc. In total, 30 minutes would be enough to tattoo all the Orcs present.

After quickly finishing up the tattooing process, he shoed them out of his dwelling and resumed the training of ‘Mana Body’ in order to increase its Proficiency Level.

The usage of this Mana Body was truly endless, but unfortunately, it could only be used for 15 minutes tops, meaning it was not really all that practical to use in the real battle. On top of that, during the Human Form, that time became even shorter at 5 minutes. If he used it for any longer than that, he would go light-headed and promptly pass out.

‘Rise into the air.’

So, Sae-Jin was thinking of increasing the duration to 15 minutes while in the Human Form by leveling up the Proficiency.

However, there wasn’t enough time to raise his Proficiency after all.

All of a sudden, a red light began descending down on the world.



A heavy fog of war circulated on the defensive perimeter constructed by the countless Knights and Wizards.

The military had already retreated far behind the frontlines since they would only become a burden had they stayed. The only people left here and waiting, were the Knights and Wizards; but even many of them were either deeply nervous or were scared of the upcoming great war.

This wasn’t the first Red Moon to appear in the history – but this one would certainly be far more difficult to hold back compared to in the past. During the previous Red Moons, the weak Monsters appeared first, then gradually, to stronger ones – but now, there was no distinction between the Monsters anymore. *(TL: in case if you’re wondering why... remember the great land upheaval that pretty much made the Monster field unsafe? Yeah, that’s why.)*

It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that they might end up having to fight high Tiered

Monsters such as Basilisks, Manticores, or even Wyverns on the first day.

Kim Yu-Rin could definitely sympathise with their worries and fears. After all, even her own heart was beating in an unsettled manner for a while now.

“How are you feeling?”

Even still, she tried to calm the person next to her – Yu Sae-Jung, who was just as tense as the other Knights.

“Eh? Ah, yes, I’m okay.”

From the back of Yu Sae-Jung’s neck, exposed by her hair tied upwards, a faint outline of a pretty tattoo could be seen. Kim Yu-Rin thought that was probably the famous Magic Tattoo of Kim Sae-Jin.

Some people criticised Sae-Jin for only tattooing the members of his Society, but what could they do about it? He could do as he liked, after all.

“The Society Chairman did it for me, while saying, ‘don’t die out there’.”

Realising that Kim Yu-Rin was looking at the tattoos, Yu Sae-Jung’s face reddened slightly, maybe out of pride or from shyness.

Kim Yu-Rin was somewhat envious of such feelings of young love.

“So that’s how it is. Then, you should make sure not to die, right?”

“Yep. Of course.”

As the two of them smiled at each other...

Out of the blue, there was a commotion by the defensive perimeter.

They quickly looked up at the sky.

A bloody colour was spreading on the previously snow white full moon like a spilled ink.

“It has begun.”

When Yu Sae-Jung murmured, Kim Yu-Rin somberly nodded her head.

– *Kiiiiieeeck!!!*

It only took an instant for the darkness blocking their view to change to crimson colour.

The Monsters' maddened screams filled the mountainside. The roars of the Monsters rumbled around and around, until reaching up high into the sky and touching the Red Moon, causing the morale of the gathered defenders to plummet further.

*\*SFX for loud thumping noises\**

Incredible tremor akin to earthquake rushed towards them.

*"Get ready for combat!!"*

Out from the communication crystal, a resolute shout of a man came out. It was the voice of Kim Hyun-Seok, Yu-Rin's father. She unsheathed her sword at the incoming order.

And from a distance away, a Monster revealed its huge, wriggling body.

Its eyes blood-red, its jaw lined with teeth that were shaped like pincers and the numerous legs rubbing on the ground below, the 'Giant Centipede' approached the location of the defenders.

From the get-go, a difficult High Tier Monster had appeared. Its massive bulk and the grotesque appearance were enough to scare the living daylights out of some junior Knights here.

Kim Yu-Rin took a glance to her side. Clearly scared, Yu Sae-Jung's hands gripping the sword was trembling.

*"Do not fear."*

Yu-Rin gently held the girl's hand.

*"...Yes."*

Yu Sae-Jung looked at her and nodded.



Basilisks, Giant Centipedes, Wyverns, Griffins, Flesh Golems, etc, etc...

High ranked Monsters, many of them incredibly rare and hard to encounter even once in one's lifetime, poured in like tsunami waves.

And as the opponents of the week-long Red Moon's first day the Knights had to face, these Monsters were simply too vicious and frightening.

Knights who ran away were quite a few in number. It was par for the course, really – as they were lower ranked and just too young to have experienced such absurd situations before.

*\*SFX of someone sobbing\**

There were also many Knights breaking down in tears after losing their limbs.

Clearly, the defenders were in a numerical disadvantage in this battle.

But regardless, Kim Yu-Rin swung her sword.

The blue sword aura became the storm winds of Mana and swept away countless Monsters. And from the gap between the walls of Monsters she just created, Yu-Rin spotted a Lich casting magic spells far away.

From the beginning, the very first target Knights aimed to kill was the enemy spellcaster. As soon as she spotted the Monster, she held the sword in reverse grip and stabbed the earth with it.

It was the attack containing her Trait, 'Desideratum'.

In that moment, a huge Mana blade formed in the air just above where the Lich was standing and sank into the surface of the ground. The Lich, now its body divided in half, became dust particles when the belated secondary explosion took place.

And so, she repeatedly fought her desperate battles, over and over again.

However, the overall status of the battle was still not good; the defensive line was about to collapse. It was a desperately bad situation. No matter what, the frontline must never be breached.

She now saw the subordinate Knights battling an Ogre over yonder, one of the sword aura slicing the Monster's wrist. Among them was Yu Sae-Jung, whom reminded Yu-Rin of her younger days for some reason.

Kim Yu-Rin summoned her strength once more and grasped her sword tightly.

——-!!!

Right then – from somewhere, a violent tremor spread out on the ground. And shortly afterwards, the powerful roar shattered the sky above.

That was definitely not from a human, for sure.

*\*SFX for thunderous footsteps\**

The footsteps began to close in.

In despair, the Knights looked on towards the direction of the sound.

And there was a group of Orcs.

It wasn't a big number.

But the appearance of the leading Orc was so overwhelmingly imposing, as if to imply it could do the job of a thousand men.

And so, the Orc Great Warrior that had suddenly entered the battlefield, with its lengthy hair whipping against the wind, rushed forward like a shooting star – or maybe even a wild beast – and swung its mace in the air.

*Kwaaaaahhang!!*

The terrifying shock wave undulated like a stormy wave and swept across the battlefield.

Judging by their red eyes, the Hero Orc's group was definitely under the influence of

the Red Moon.

However... their enemies were not humans, but Monsters.

<<<<

Whenever the Orc Great Warrior swung his mace, the sounds of destruction akin to the Big Bang explosion shook the world and Monster's body parts were turned to mush. From the contact points of the mace, flames sometimes flared up, and other times a bitter coldness harsh enough to freeze the land rushed out.

*Kwang-! Kwang-! Kwang-!*

And the reason for such changes in the elements were, without a doubt, Mana surrounding the mace.

The Orc Great Warrior displayed overwhelming martial prowess as it ran amok. His mace did not differentiate what Monster it was. Other Orcs, Ogres, Gnolls, Spartois, etc., etc. – as soon as they came in contact with the destructive swing of the weapon, all were ripped apart like the blowing dust.

The perfect physique of the Orc Great Warrior withstood almost all the physical attacks. Even if it was surrounded by hundreds of Monsters, he received not one wound. And so, this creature didn't even bother to defend against enemy's attacks or try to avoid them, instead choosing to concentrate on utter destruction only.

Blowing away the stomach of an Ogre blocking his forward march, then freezing the headless knight Dullahan on the spot – the Orc even fired his own powerful sword aura towards an airborne Wyvern to bring it down.

The deeply-impressionable sight of the Great Warrior battling hundreds, thousands of enemies all alone – the God of War had descended on earth.

The Knights of this battlefield dazedly witnessed this display of martial might that was vicious but at the same time, also utterly mesmerising.

*\*SFX for a loud roar of the Orc\**

The Orc Great Warrior roared out wildly, covered from head to toe in blood.

In any other times, such a roar would induce fear, but right now, people found it quite reassuring instead. It was loud enough to instill the belief that the flow of this battle could be reversed, back into the hearts of many. Some Knights also ended up roaring out as they renewed their unceasing attacks on the Monsters.

Among them was Kim Yu-Rin and Yu Sae-Jung as well.

And so, the 2nd round began.



The moon finally hid below the horizon and the sunlight began to brighten the world.

The Red Moon had ended, at least for today. There were many casualties. Not just those Knights who had passed out from losing their body parts, but also those who had actually lost their lives.

“ ... ”

However, the Knights gathered here could not express their sorrow that easily. They just couldn't, after seeing the sad and lonesome expression of the Orc Great Warrior which was surveying the corpse of one of its own.

The brave Hero Orcs that came to help them even under the influence of the Red Moon – the initial group of 30 had now dwindled down to less than half of its original number. It was difficult to fathom the depths of sadness of the leader of these Hero Orcs, its *Chieftain*, as their numbers were low to begin with.

“...Soo-Gyeom,” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin called out to her subordinate Knight, Kim Soo-Gyeom after gazing at the Orc with equally sad eyes.

“Yes?”

“Here. Hold onto this for a bit.”

She handed over her treasured sword to him and slowly approached the Hero Orc.

*\*SFX for light footsteps\**



Stepping over the dried blood on the ground, she stepped in front of the Orc 'Chieftain'.

"...Hey." (Kim Yu-Rin)

Yu-Rin carefully reached out and touched the Orc's shoulder. The Orc felt this very faint sense of being touched and when he turned his head to look...

"\*&@#%\*!!!"

...He took several steps back in shock. He got so surprised, he nearly ended up tumbling over backwards, even.

"Eh..."

At his reaction, Yu-Rin's expression became somewhat wounded.

'... What does she want now?' (Kim Sae-Jin)

Kim Sae-Jin's flustered state didn't want to calm down so easily.

"Do you, maybe, remember... me?"

"..."

Even still, Yu-Rin tried to chat to him. Wondering if this woman developed a habit of trying to talk to Monsters, Sae-Jin continued to stare at her with genuinely confused mind.

"Ma'am, what are you doing?"

From afar back, scared shouts of Knights could be heard.

Although they did fight together until now, this Orc just lost over half of its brethren. No one knew what might happen if it got peeved off at something she might end up doing...

"..."

Thankfully, the fears of those Knights were assuaged in the next instance with a nod from the Orc Great Warrior.

“Ah. That is... wonderful news. What a relief... *sir*.”

Without realising it, Yu-Rin began speaking politely. It felt like to her that the Orc could understand her words.

“I... am sorry for your loss.”

Kim Yu-Rin pointed at the corpse of the Orc sprawled on the ground and spoke. However, the Orc Great Warrior simply stared at her for a long time, not showing any reaction whatsoever.

But, all of a sudden...

The Great Warrior raised its hand high.

“Ma’am!!”

Even a single fist strike could cause a fatal injury to Kim Yu-Rin. The Knights rushed forward in fear.

“...Huh?”

But right next moment, all of them had to stop abruptly.

The raised hand of the Orc Great Warrior lightly descended on top of Yu-Rin’s head, and he proceeded to pat her hair gently.

“*Keum*.”

After letting out a single fake cough out of embarrassment, the Great Warrior then turned around and left the battlefield. The surviving Orcs started following him.

“...Mmm...”

Yu-Rin chased after the back of the Great Warrior with her eyes. Strangely enough, there was a healthy red glow on both of her cheeks.

# CHAPTER 77

## RED MOON (3)

---

The area where the chaos of the Red Moon had swept across was now filled with forlorn silence and stillness.

Under the dim glow of the early morning sunlight, the wounded Knights were carried off to the temporary infirmary set up towards the rear, and several Knights, fatigued from the endless combat and lacking even the energy to get to the rest area, decided to just plop down on the ground and take break right there.

However, even among this scene of near-silent breaths and intermittent groans of pain, there were a few Knights present whose first priority wasn't about resting up, but to tease a certain person nonstop.

"...I've already told you many times, it's not like that." (Kim Yu-Rin)

Thanks to that, the person who was probably the most tired of them all, Kim Yu-Rin, couldn't even take a proper break and instead had to make excuses one after another.

As one could imagine, the problem was with her face going red after the Hero Orc patted her head. The sight of her crimson cheeks and the past her declaring 'the Goblin is her ideal person' overlapped into one and that resulted in her being seen as a pervert with a weird fetish.

"But it's a bit, you know, to say you're not... I have never seen our Team Captain make a face like that before... It's okay, Miss Yu-Rin, you can talk to me. You know I am good at keeping secrets." (Yi Hye-Rin)

Among them, even though one of her arms were heavily wounded, Yi Hye-Rin didn't forget to be cheerful and teased Yu-Rin more than anyone else. It was most likely because, without this kind of distraction, it'd be too difficult for Hye-Rin to endure the horrors of what happened here only a few hours ago.

"No, I'm telling you, honestly it's not like that!! It's just that..."

*...I was panicking a little because of the manly scent coming from the Orc, that's all.*

As her chain of thought reached up to here, all of a sudden, a spark was ignited in her head.

The Orc's scent was similar to another one she smelled somewhere else. Although the smell of blood and iron got in the way of detecting it properly, as her senses were sharply tuned, she could pick up on the unexplainable but definite similarity between the Orc's and that other scent.

"...Just that, and...? Oh, no~ what should we do now~? What's gone wrong with our Team Captain's preference in men~?"

"H, hey, I said, it's not like that!!!"

"Ah-aht!! That's why Miss Yu-Rin was not dating anyo... Eu-euph!!"

Kim Yu-Rin hurriedly dashed out and covered Hye-Rin's mouth.

And so, as she began wasting what little energy she had left on something quite useless, the questions of regarding that scent's origins got naturally faded into the background.



Returning to the village with the surviving dozen or so Orcs, Sae-Jin laid down to take a good rest. But he only needed four hours of sleep. The body of the Great Warrior didn't want a break any longer than that.

And so, after waking up when the sun was exactly right in the middle of the sky, he searched for his mobile phone.

"Oh. So, there hasn't been anything strange with Muffin so far, yes?"

– *"Yes, sir. With no red moonlight touching her, she didn't behave erratically or anything like that."* (Jo Hahn-Sung)

The Red Moon caused frenzied and mindless state only by coming into contact with the Monsters in the first place. So, rather fortunately, Muffin wasn't affected by it as she was hidden deep underground.

"Alright. Then please continue taking care of the Society's matters in the future as well.

And if something big happens, resolve it in the way you see fit. Oh, and if you're planning to hire more people, please don't forget that I need to see them at least once."

– *"I understand, Mister Chairman."*

Jo Hahn-Sung enthusiastically replied. Sae-Jin still had one more thing left to say, though.

"Have you really understood what I said? I said, 'in the future'. The future, Mister Hahn-Sung."

– *"... I beg your pardon?"*

"What I'm saying is, not just for this week only, but from now on, you take the reins of managing the Society in the future."

This was something Sae-Jin had been thinking about lately. As the Society grew, it would become more specialised and integrated – but, well, having a final decision maker who was rather ignorant of the world's business, as well as suffering from chronic shortage of time, now wouldn't that be a fatal disadvantage going forward?

That was why it might be better to delegate his role to someone else altogether. No, it should be better. After all, he was already doing nothing much other than giving his approvals, anyway.

– *"Mister Chairman, are you perhaps going off to somewhere far?"*

"No, it's not like that, just that, it's all bothersome, you see? Besides, Mister Hahn-Sung is twice smarter than I am, anyways. Ah, right. This doesn't mean I'm completely relinquishing my position at all. Mister Jo Hahn-Sung as the acting CEO, and I'm the majority shareholder – something like that type of arrangement."

– *"That, that is..."*

"It's alright. I know. It's too big a topic to talk over the phone, so let's meet up later on and hash it out. I'm hanging up now. I'm running short on time, you see."

– *"Ye, yes, sir."*

Even though he was still trying to recover his senses from the sudden, super-fast

promotion, Jo Hahn-Sung somehow managed to reply back.

Sae-Jin chuckled slightly and ended the call.

The time to train was here. He changed back to the Orc Great Warrior Form.



The following evening.

Before the horrifying memories of the previous night, when Monsters ranked higher than upper Mid Tier such as Ogres flooded in like invading ants, had the chance to fade away, the second Red Moon appeared. But unlike the initial fears, this time the defenders faced waves of much weaker Monsters.

Perhaps, that first night must have been just an anomaly. The same thing happened the day after, and then on the day after that as well.

The presence of outstanding Knights and Wizards, as well as the now-familiar dependable ally Hero Orc, who could easily substitute for a thousand men, made enduring the Red Moon somewhat easier.

Of course, during the week-long duration of the Red Moon, not all waves of Monsters would be this simple to contain, but still, the participating Knights were able to store up their strength this way.

“What’s the matter? You should just ask him out on a date~.” (Yi Hye-Rin)

And now, after the fifth night of the battle had ended. As Kim Yu-Rin continued to stare blankly at the back of the Hero Orc, Yi Hye-Rin began to tease her once more.

“Fuu-hut.”

Even Yu Sae-Jung started giggling on the side as she wiped the dried blood off her sword. But then, Yu-Rin’s sharp glares landed on her, and all Sae-Jung could do at that moment was to hurriedly stare down at the ground.

“Be mindful of where you are. Right now, Knight Yi Hye-Rin and I are not of the same rank. Do I look like a friend to you?!”

“...My apologies, ma’am.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

It seemed that humouring them until now had become a problem.

When Kim Yu-Rin hardened her face and shouted out aloud, only then Yi Hye-Rin stopped with her teasing.

“I thought that, because the Team Captain’s eyes looked so dreamy...”

“T, this idiot is?!”

...Looked like she was stopping, but...

“I mean, really now. Past four days, after battles are over you’ve been bringing water to him~. And when he’s about to leave, you see him out, too~~. It’s so like watching a shy maiden’s actions with a guy she fell in love at first sight or something. At first I was teasing you, but now... I’m genuinely worried about you, Captain. Please pull yourself together.”

Yi Hye-Rin fired off words like machinegun rounds.

And at her words, Kim Yu-Rin made a slightly panicking face. She was only trying to figure out that smell of the Orc, but now that she thought about it, her actions did look strange enough to rouse misunderstandings.

“...Inter-species mating is not allowed, you know? Morally, legally, and even scientifically, it’s definitely not allowed.”

“E... Eeeek!! It’s not like that!! I told you over and over again, it’s not what you think!!”

When Yi Hye-Rin spoke with 100% pure worry in her voice, Kim Yu-Rin shouted back with her face totally red.



Already a week had passed since the beginning of the Red Moon that made the public worry deeply. For Korea though, the damage it received was far lower compared to other countries.

While the 1st world nations such as the USA and the Western Europe faced

unprecedented loss of life and destruction of property due the Red Moon, in Korea, the defenders fought so well that the 1st defensive line hadn't even been breached yet. It was all thanks to the Hero Orc and the brave Knights, of course.

On top of that, an unknown Knight revealed the part of a footage to the world, filmed in the middle of the defense against the Red Moon, which featured the Hero Orc's role in the battle. The Orc's absolutely overwhelming martial prowess was captured in it.

The video spread out to the rest of the world in an instant, and not just within the country, but even the other countries boiled over with the stories regarding the Hero Orc.

Within the span of the Red Moon week, the fame of the Hero Orc had risen up so high that practically, everyone knew who it was. Hell, some overseas nations enquired the Korean government about loaning the Hero Orcs out to them, saying that they'd like to take a male and female pair and have them live in their nations' own respective Monster fields...

And so, the Red Moon continued to remain as a source of many talking points as well as great sorrow but finally, on the 8th day of the Red Moon, a very good news spread among the defenders.

"It's going to end the day after tomorrow!!"

The current location was the 1st defensive perimeter that had become a total wasteland. After receiving a phone call, Joo Ji-Hyuk shouted out in a happy expression. And that caused many wounded and suffering Knights to abruptly open their eyes wide.

"...Huh? Really?! Who said that?"

Yi Hye-Rin was the first to run over and ask. And before anyone knew it, even Kim Yu-Rin and Yu Sae-Jung were standing behind Joo Ji-Hyuk now. But other Knights couldn't muster up the courage to intrude on the so-called 'Monster Family', so they could only eavesdrop from a distance.

"It's from the Chairman. He said that Lycan had informed him."

The smile on Ji-Hyuk's face showed no signs of disappearing.



“Wah. Then that’s for real~ Ahssaya~!” (Yi Hye-Rin)

Yi Hye-Rin stretched her arms grandly.

Nowadays, the Lycan’s words were accepted as truth, almost on the level of worship, even. There was the contribution of catching Vampires, but more importantly, he was the very first person in the history to detect signs of the approaching Red Moon a week in advance.

“...Wait a sec. Did you say Oppa had called?”

But for some reason, Yu Sae-Jung glared at Joo Ji-Hyuk with stiff face as if something was unsatisfactory.

“Eh? Oh, ah... Yes.” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

<<<<

“But why didn’t he call me?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

She began complaining and pulled out her mobile phone. Of course, there was no call from Kim Sae-Jin.

“Oh, he said he’d call you soon.” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

“...He did?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

*\*SFX for phone ringing\**

The mobile phone began ringing at the same time. Yu Sae-Jung’s face remained weird as she tried hard to not to show that she was expecting this call while she checked out the LCD screen. And right away, a bright smile bloomed on her lips.

“May I be excused for a while, please~.”

Yu Sae-Jung went towards a quiet area with no people – place where she could talk unhindered – with steps light and soft enough to make her float in the air.

And the two woman, Kim Yu-Rin and Yi Hye-Rin who not only didn’t have a boyfriend but didn’t even have someone they liked, chased after the back of Sae-Jung with

envious eyes.



As the sky began to redden, the Knights began to grasp their weapons, and Wizards began channeling Mana in their bodies, all getting ready for another night of battle up ahead. The preparation before the battle was top notch. The morale was deeply boosted with the belief that if they survived tonight and the night after, this damned war would come to an end.

*\*SFX for roars of Monsters\**

From somewhere, the cries of Monsters rang high into the sky.

In the distance, the legendary Monster Basilisk could be seen. And there was the single-eyed Ogre which was reputedly the most powerful of all Ogres, a ‘Cyclops’.

All the Monsters appearing hadn’t been seen until now. This was going to be a difficult fight without a doubt. Everyone began tensing up. But none of them scattered.

The belief in themselves having grown both emotionally and physically gave them much confidence, and also, there was also the powerful ally helping them out which helped them relax just a little bit more.

“All troops, ready your arms!!”

Kim Yu-Rin loudly shouted out.

Mana coming out from the numerous Knights and Wizards present started humming in the air.



Kim Sae-Jin, the Orc Great Warrior, swung his mace and then swung some more in this chaotic battlefield. From the mace overflowing with Mana, shock waves and Mana-infused ‘sword’ auras burst out repeatedly, ripping Monsters to shreds. The ground brutally split apart, and fountains of blood sprayed into the air, making the red moonlight redder still.

The word overwhelming suited the Orc's fighting prowess, but the source of this display of irrepressible power was actually thanks to a certain wonderful cycle that started off by killing Monsters in the first place.

His Skill 'Predator' reinforced his strength the more Monsters he killed. And so, in this place overflowing with Monsters, whenever he smashed one apart, Sae-Jin was growing stronger. In other words, even if he couldn't kill a Monster today, after going through the day's rapid growth, he'd be able to kill it the following day.

It was the same for absorbing the Mana Stones as well. Normally, in order to absorb one, he'd have to dig it out from the heart of the Monsters which would garner a few curious onlookers, but now that he had this 'Mana Body', the process had become a lot simpler. He'd just have to touch the dead Monster's body to send in his Mana and assimilate the Mana Stone.

And so, he absorbed all the Mana Stones of the countless dead Monsters lining up on the ground like a glutton, even in the middle of this crazy melee.

One could say that for Kim Sae-Jin, this Red Moon was perhaps the greatest 'event' for crazy leveling up, making him stronger today than yesterday, and stronger still tomorrow compared to today.

*\*SFX for an Orcish roar\**

But for now, he didn't have enough time to focus on his growth.

He had spotted Kim Yu-Rin in the distance, fighting hard against a Bladed Dokkaebi. Maybe it was because she'd been fighting nonstop for the past four hours, the Mana covering her sword was getting dimmer and dimmer by the second.

The Orc immediately kicked the ground and rushed towards her location. After arriving there while raising a tempest, he raised the mace up high. And then, slammed down with 'Fierce Strike', loaded with seriously ridiculous destructive power.

*Kwaaaahaang!!*

The Bladed Dokkaebi raised both of its arms to block the mace but it was simply not adequate enough. The two arms of this Monster, reputedly as strong as that of adamantium, shattered like glass.

*\*SFX for a 'thing' going splat\**

After losing its arms, the Bladed Dokkaebi turned around in order to run away. Obviously, the Orc didn't allow that to happen and he powerfully smacked the back of the Monster's head with the mace.

With the dull sound of destruction, the Monster's head split open like a crushed tomato.

"Kheuk!"

Unfortunately, Kim Yu-Rin got caught up in the shock wave of the Orc's attack, and fell down on the ground.

"...Gheu-euh."

The Orc approached her and offered his hand. Kim Yu-Rin blankly stared at the creature for a moment, before grabbing it and pulling herself up.

"...Aht."

As soon as she was up, the Orc once more patted her on the head.

She felt like she had reverted back to being a little kid. But it didn't all feel bad. No, it rather felt pretty good, instead. Besides from her father when she was very young, Yu-Rin hadn't felt this sensation of being protected by a dependable man up until now...

"...Ha-ahp!!"

However, Kim Yu-Rin deliberately roughly slapped away the Orc's hand and let out a loud shout. Her face felt hot for some reason. It was like, she was beginning to think, how dare a lowly Orc look down on humans...

"Just die!"

She loaded Mana into her sword and swung it. The winds of Mana spread around like the waves of the rough sea.

But at that exact moment, the violent current of Mana suddenly shot up from the ground.

This was energy from a strange magic spell being activated.

“Everyone...!!”

Carrying a shocked expression, Kim Yu-Rin quickly turned her head towards her subordinate Knights.

And then – the ground she was standing on collapsed noisily.

# CHAPTER 78

## RED MOON (4)

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The invading coldness and the water drops falling on her body woke Kim Yu-Rin up.

It was pitch dark everywhere. The steam of breath escaping her lips were white. It was really cold in here. So, she tried to wrap her body with the Mana Barrier. However, Mana in her body didn't respond.

Thanks to the puzzlement and the subsequent realisation of the severity of this situation woke her up from the dazed state real fast. At the same time...

*"...Kheu-eu."*

She heard a low growl out of the blue. Surprised, she quickly turned her head around and saw the Hero Orc. And her heart nearly jumped out of her mouth. He was so close that if she reached out, her hand would touch him.

She forcibly suppressed her wildly beating heart and tried to stand up. It seemed like she must've hit something while falling, as her knee joints ached. But figuring out where she was had higher priority than worrying about such pain for now.

So, she looked around.

For a cave she fell into after the ground gave in, this place sure looked... man-made. And for some strange reason, she could not control her Mana at all.

'Is this because of an isolation barrier?'

With a dead-serious face, Yu-Rin touched the dark wall of the cave. And when her skin came in contact with the wall, a strangely cold sensation crept up all over her body.

*"\*SFX for a sound someone makes while shivering in cold\*"*

She couldn't help but collapse back down while her body trembled from the invading coldness.

And seeing her like this, Kim Sae-Jin let out a quiet sigh. Just what the heck was this bothersome situation, when he was getting sleepy from using up so much of his own Mana?

‘But man, where is this place anyways?’

Only after he activated the Eyes of the Wolf could he check out the interior of the cave better, but still, the end could not be seen at all. There wasn’t even a single beam of light in this perfect darkness.

Feeling frustrated and irritated, he began pressing down on his forehead.

“It’s an isolation barrier magic,” said Kim Yu-Rin. “Since there is a high probability that simple collapsing of the ground would not harm the Knights who can use Mana Barriers, it seems like there had been a specialised isolation enchantment placed here beforehand. But a Lich can not lay out such a multi-layered magic spell.”

She turned her head to look at the Orc. She wasn’t sure whether he could understand her words or not, but seeing that he was quietly gazing at her made her think that maybe, he could.

“That’s because a Lich lacks any form of reasoning and so it only uses destructive spells. That’s why this was the handiwork of humans for sure.”

“...”

The Orc wordlessly nodded his head.

‘Man, this is so damn frustrating.’

The mouth of Kim Sae-Jin the Orc was itching madly right now. The Proficiency for the Vocal Cord Reconstruction had increased so ‘nicely’ that now it was already at B, meaning it was not a problem to talk in this Orc Form. However, for an Orc to talk like a human was... just a bit wrong, was it not? Of course, Kim Yu-Rin did meet a talking Goblin in the past, but still.

“In that case... should we start... walking now?”

Only half sure of the Orc understanding human speech, Kim Yu-Rin gestured with her hand. Then, the Orc really took the lead and began walking deeper into the cave.

“Huh.”

She stood there with her mouth hanging loose while staring at the back of the Orc in a daze, before waking up from the stupor to hurriedly follow him.



No matter how long they walked, the exit could not be found. And Kim Yu-Rin’s face became paler and paler as well, from the case of severe hypothermia.

Seeing her shake like a leaf next to him, Sae-Jin briefly fell into a dilemma. Currently, he had a coat-type armour inside his body via Spiritualisation. If he brought that out and handed it over to her, she wouldn’t shake like that.

“...Ha, ah...”

He could hear her freezing breaths. In a way, that was expected. The coldness in this cave was harsh enough to make him, an Orc, feel the deathly chilliness as well. And within this bitter coldness, she couldn’t use the armour made out of Mana, the most important ability of a Knight, the Mana Barrier...

“...Ha-ah. Eut.”

*-Tahk.*

Kim Yu-Rin ‘s footsteps stopped after her feet hit a pebble on the ground. She tried desperately to hold onto her weakening consciousness, but she no longer had any more strength left to endure this bitter coldness anymore.

And so, her eyes slowly began to close.

“Fuu.”

As he couldn’t help it, the Orc took out one of the armours from within his body.

A black coat-style armour that easily approached the rank of Branded Goods – although he didn’t add an attribute like controlling the body temperature on it, as he used the ‘crimson stones’ as base ingredients, it should be okay since those stones could naturally create heat.



“Ha-ah...”

Using that small window of opportunity when Yu-Rin’s eyes were closed, he instantly changed the appearance of the coat into a blanket via Spiritualisation. And he wrapped her with it as she tottered around uneasily on her feet, about to fall down.

“...Uh? Huh?”

Almost right away, the warmth from the crimson stones permeated into Yu-Rin’s entire body. And thanks to experiencing this warmth within the bitter coldness, her legs lost strength momentarily and she ended up falling down anyway.

“Kkeu-aht!” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“...Kheum.”

The Orc stared at her with slightly disbelieving eyes, before holding her slender shoulders to pull her up to her feet.

“Ah...”

After standing up straight, she glanced down at the warm blanket covering her. She had no idea where this thing came from, but this was perfectly fine since the coldness melted away like snow.

“This... Thank you.”

She began to show her gratitude while still being propped up by the Orc’s arms. But weirdly enough, both of her cheeks were dyed in deep crimson for some reason.



Because of the sudden collapse of the ground, the defensive line received a damage akin to total annihilation. Several dozen Knights went missing and among them was a Highest Tier Knight who made up a considerable part of the fighting force, Kim Yu-Rin.

“...Just what happened here?”

A High Tier Knight affiliated with the Raven Order, Park Hyun pointed at a certain part

of the ground, which had sunk into the distant bottom.

“After causing the earth to collapse with magic, it seems that via prepared magic circles, summoning and isolation barrier magics have been activated. That’s why we can’t summon them back. There is naught we can do but to wait until they find a way to reverse the summoning from inside the barrier.”

Kim Hyun-Seok, the Master of the Raven Order and the commander in charge of this defensive line, spoke. Even though his own daughter had gone missing, he continued to maintain a cold and composed attitude.

“...Then, what should be our next move, commander? Miss Kim Yu-Rin, who had stepped up to the leading role, and most of her subordinates are unaccounted for, so to just evacuate like this...”

“She has lived all her life in hardship. She’ll come back alive, somehow. For now, we’re retreating to the rear-most defensive line and get ready for the final day’s battle. We can not protect this 1st line any longer.”

If this defensive line was given up, then searching for the missing Knights would become much more difficult. It might have been a rational decision to make, but at the same time, it was a cold one as well.

But the subordinate Knight couldn’t say anything else.

Underneath all that soil, under that isolation barrier, Kim Hyun-Seok’s daughter was trapped in there.

In other words, this decision was made by one person who would’ve wanted to find the missing Knights more than anyone else here.

“...Yes, sir. Understood.”



At the same time.

An Orc and a single female Knight were still walking inside this unknown cave.

“There are magic circles engraved all over the cave. Without a doubt, they confirm that

this place is artificially created. And also, even though our side had many Wizards, seeing that there aren't any measures taken to help us until now, it's likely that we were brought within this isolation barrier by a summoning-type magic."

Kim Yu-Rin murmured as she carefully studied the blue-coloured magic circle on the wall. The Orc then came to stand next to her and did the same.

Yu-Rin took a glance at the Orc, before taking a couple of steps back discreetly.

'For an Orc, he sure does resemble a human, doesn't he?'

Her face reddened again at this thought suddenly entering her head.

The way this Hero Orc acted or the way his face was shaped was really quite strange. Not only did he not have the Orc's trademark protruding teeth, his facial features were sharp and well defined. Heck, even his ponytail was long and so shiny; if his skin colour was not blue and that somewhat flattish face was changed slightly, then he'd be a cool gu...

"Eu, eu, eu..."

She quickly shook her head, hard. She could not understand why such thoughts kept popping up in her head. So much so, she was actually beginning to question her own tastes as a human being.

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*"Keureung!!"*

It was then. The Orc that was staring at the magic circle on the wall suddenly grasped his mace real tight.

Even before Yu-Rin had the chance to get surprised at this sudden change in atmosphere, he slammed the wall hard with the mace.

*Kwahang!*

The powerful shock wave and the ear-shattering noise reverberated in the cave's interior.

“Kkeuk!”

Kim Yu-Rin covered her ears. Even then, she thought she could hear bells ringing in her head.

But she knew enough not to complain. Instead, she slowly approached the spot the Orc hit, and began studying it deeply.

“...There is no change.”

“Keung,”

The Orc spat out a seemingly dissatisfied snort. Smiling thinly, Yu-Rin lightly patted his arm.

“Let’s start walking again. And as far as I can tell, the way we walked isn’t the same as before, so maybe we might find answers if we continue to move forward... Mm?”

Unlike what she said just now, she could feel some kind of change. The bitter coldness of the cave seemed to have eased just a little.

“...W, wait a minute. There is a change. Uhm... Mister Orc?”

Yu-Rin ended up using a strange honorific to address the Orc. He simply nodded his head. *(TL: Yu-Rin has been using the speech pattern usually reserved for addressing older person, when talking to Sae-Jin’s Orc Form until now.)*

“Right. Let’s get going.”

Two of them began moving their feet in a hurry.

Kwang-

Kwang-

Kwang-

Afterwards, whenever they came across a magic circle, the Orc pounded on it. Normally, Mana-induced effects could not be damaged with physical attacks, but with the attribute added onto his weapon, it was now possible.

“The ‘isolation barrier’ is steadily becoming unstable!”

And when he destroyed about five of them, Kim Yu-Rin shouted out in a bright voice after sensing the nearly imperceptible vibration in the isolation magic. Then the Orc let out a short chuckle and lightly patted her head again.

“...Ha, haha...”

She wasn’t sure if this head patting thing was this Orc’s habit or not, but she still accepted it gladly while carrying a timid smile.

Funnily enough, the one who got taken aback from her reaction was Kim Sae-Jin instead. After getting surprised, he suppressed his instinctual habit and removed his hand away from her head.



After each one of the magic circles were destroyed, the isolation barrier’s effects disappeared one by one; and when around what they thought was eight hours of time had passed by, they could finally find her fainted fellow Knights.

“Ah!! Mister Orc!”

Laying down a fainted Knight on the ground, Yu-Rin hurriedly ran towards the Orc to receive him. There were two more Knights resting on his shoulders.

“It’s Hye-Rin and Soo-Gyeom. Whew... What a relief. Thank you, Mister Orc.”

She let out a sigh of relief.

They had divided their roles. Orc walked around the cave to find the fainted Knights and brought them here, while Yu-Rin looked after them in this safe area until they regained their consciousness.

“Please, carefully, carefully...”

Maybe because these two were quite close to her, she raised quite a fuss while receiving the two dead weights and carefully laid them down on the ground.

“\*Moan... \*”

Right on cue, the Knight lying closest began to groan. Surprised, Kim Yu-Rin quickly rushed over there. And just like the falling pieces of domino, as soon as one person woke up, people began regaining their consciousness, starting from the person they discovered first.

They initially let out a sigh of relief seeing Yu-Rin's face but then after discovering the Orc, nearly fainted again – only to sigh out in relief again after hearing her explanations on what had transpired here, and so, they had to go through quite a rollercoaster of emotions.

“In other words, it's still unclear if we can escape or not?”

“As we can't control Mana yet, looks like we still need to destroy a few more first.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin spoke in an overtly official manner to the subordinate Knight, her previously demure demeanor when interacting with the Orc nowhere to be seen now.

“Whew. Really, I'm relieved. Who knew that we could be safe thanks to that Orc bastard...”

“...What?”

Yu-Rin's forehead creased at the words of this subordinate. The disrespectful words ‘Orc bastard’ somehow got on her nerves. However, if she started picking fault with that, then that weird rumour might spread around even further...

“W, what's the matter, ma'am?”

“...That Orc g, guy can understand human words. We don't know what might happen so you need to watch what you say.”

While taking a quick glance at the Orc who was stretching his neck, she whispered very quietly.

“Ah... Yes, ma'am...”

The subordinate nodded, while carrying a slightly weirded out expression.

# CHAPTER 79

## RED MOON (5)

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With Kim Yu-Rin and the Orc as their lead, a group of 37 Knights were busy with their unplanned cave exploration for the past 24 hours or so.

And as the bitter coldness decreased to 'chilly' with the destruction of the magic circles they had come across, they encountered no other survival issues other than the slowly encroaching hunger and the onset of fatigue.

Unfortunately, strange Monsters that were suspected to be a part of the defense mechanism against the sudden disabling of the isolation barrier suddenly began to appear one after the other.

A three-headed dog that resembled the legendary Cerberus; a strange Chimera Monster that had a body of an Orc but a head of a deer; A grotesque floating eyeball with tentacles sprouting out of it, etc, etc...

Since the Knights trapped within this place couldn't use Mana at all for some reason, the Hero Orc had to step up here and well, he took care of all the threats quite easily. Even the Monsters that looked strong enough to make the Knights tense up, got smashed apart like potato crisps under the Orc's mace.

"Let's take a look. Ah, there are so many scratches..." (Kim Yu-Rin)

But still, these Monsters possessed enough power to damage the Leviathan's scales, thus he ended up receiving quite a few scars. Whenever that happened, though, Kim Yu-Rin pulled out an emergency potion from her waist-mounted bag and started applying on his body.

And the other Knights had this dumbfounded expressions as they bore witness to this... 'heart-warming' scene.

"...H, hey, isn't that getting really serious now?! Miss Yu-Rin has never done anything like that for me until now..." (Kim Soo-Gyeom)

Among them, Kim Soo-Gyeom's body was quaking from intense jealousy. He'd jump in

there and separate the two if he could just muster up some courage, but...

But, he just couldn't dare to go near that Orc with the massive, hulking physique, while also holding that destructive mace of his.

"Eiii, no way... No way... But wouldn't that be interesting? And we get new things to tease her with, too."

With a smiling face, Yi Hye-Rin gazed at the back of Yu-Rin and the Orc.

"Ahh~ I wish I had my phone with me so I can take some snaps of the two... How regretful, I say. So regretful."

Even inside this gloomy cave, Yi Hye-Rin didn't lose her trademark active and easy-going personality.

Unfortunately, even that upbeat attitude couldn't last forever.

The problem was with the length of this cave; it seemed endless, no matter how long they walked.

In the end, the Knights could no longer endure the accumulated fatigue after walking another 6 hours on top of the 24 they spent prior, and decided to set up a camp in the middle of the cave.

And as soon as they stopped their forward march, the loud rumbling sounds of the Knights' empty stomachs rang out in a coordinated symphony.

"Aaaahhh..."

The one thing Knights hated the most was hunger. From the early ages, the rigorous training and the cultivation of Mana led to these Knights having powerful bodies that ended up leaving them with much higher rate of metabolism compared to normal people.

It was even more severe in case of Kim Yu-Rin. The bitter pain from the stomach acid escaping from her stomach spread throughout her body and as a result, countless large, cold drops of sweat were forming all over her.

'... Can't these fools do anything without Mana?'



Kim Sae-Jin grumbled inwardly but still, he had to seriously think about what to do here.

The leather pouch tied to his waist had one of those space expanding magic added to it. Inside, there was enough food to last him a month, as well as numerous Monster remains he got from all the hunting he did.

If he pulled those out, then he might be able to stave off starvation for now...

*\*SFX for empty stomachs loudly grumbling\**

From somewhere, a loud roar exploded and shook the interior of the cave. Stunned by this, the Orc hurriedly turned his head to the side to see what's what, only to find Kim Yu-Rin with her face completely painted in red and avoiding making eye contacts with him.

"Eu-eu..."

Unable to endure her moaning, the Orc ended up pulling out the meat of wild boar with its skin neatly removed.

This vicious animal was called 'Trabong Boar', a creature that sat in the boundary between being a Monster and a regular wild beast. It was famed as a delicacy and was treated a top ingredient as a result.

"Huh!!"

"Ah, aht!!"

Every Knight's eyes present here gleamed dangerously the moment that juicy red piece of meat emerged from his pouch. Even Kim Yu-Rin became totally speechless, silently staring at the meat. And, a drop of drool fell from the corner of her mouth...

"...Ah. We don't have fire..."

But her expression sank deeply when she suddenly realised this fact.

The Orc chuckled inwardly as he began laying down Mana on the ground. Probably because the way he used Mana was fundamentally different from that of the Knights here, Sae-Jin had no trouble whatsoever in converting that Mana into flames.

“What?!”

Not only Kim Yu-Rin, but everyone else suddenly rushed in closer, their eyes shining brightly. The Orc then laid the boar meat on the fire.

*\*SFX for oil from meat sizzling in heat\**

The fatally powerful aroma and the sound effect stimulated the two senses of all the Knights present here at the same time.

But then, Sae-Jin remembered that he didn't have any seasoning with him.

‘... Hmm, should I try *that* method now?’

And that was to pour in Mana into food and change the flavour that way. He had never try this out yet, but he was still proud of the fact that, due to the Goblin's Craftsmanship as well as its highly attuned tastebuds, his own sense of taste had reached a certain high level as well.

That's why he figured that it'd be fine to simply use Mana to get the desired level of saltiness and sweetness.

“...Keureung.”

Seizing the gap between the Knights' attention, the Orc poured Mana into the meat.



Although the boar's size was pretty big, as there were many mouths to feed here, each person ended up receiving six pieces of meat only.

But after realising that he could add different attributes to food as well, Sae-Jin added the attributes that could give the sensation of 'satiety' on the meat. And that caused the Knights to fall down on the ground after being utterly moved by the food's taste as well as how it satisfied their hunger.

In other words, the best condiment in the world that made the greatest delicacies of all was surely the empty stomach.

“ ... ”

Even Kim Yu-Rin was immersed deeply in the lingering aftertaste of the delicious meal, her eyes firmly closed in reverence as she relived the moment when the meat melted inside her mouth.

“Well, now... since we’ve eaten, why don’t get some shut-eye...?”

From the back, the voice of an unknown male Knight came through, and many others agreed with this idea. And so, they began to lie down on the cold floor of the cave one by one.

“Captain, it’s fine, right?”

Yi Hye-Rin inquired with a sleepy voice.

“Alright. Since we walked for a long time, let’s take a small break.”

Kim Yu-Rin’s eyes were half closed as she replied. And that’s how all the Knights fell into a slumber in an instant. But only the Orc stood up from his spot. After all, the body of the Great Warrior didn’t need a whole lot of sleep, so he appointed himself as the lookout for now.

But eventually, he got bored after looking around the surroundings for about one hour and so he began studying the faces of the sleeping Knights instead. Most of their faces looked uncomfortable, but even so, the deep creases on Kim Yu-Rin’s forehead especially showed no sign of easing.

Seeing her uncomfortable face, a thought suddenly popped up in his mind and Sae-Jin began making a naughty smile.



Drifting out of her sleep, Yu-Rin turned her body this way and that, until she felt something strange. As if she was using a pillow made out of solid metal, it was hard just beneath her head.

“...”

She opened her eyes in confusion, only to see the face of the Orc with his own eyes closed. Confused even more at this situation, she began surveying her surroundings, and then realised that she was using his thigh as a pillow.

“Eu-ah!!”

The shocked Kim Yu-Rin bolted right up, causing the Orc to open his eyes as well.

“...It, it's nothing. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to wake you up.”

Kim Yu-Rin ended up apologising first after mistakenly believing that she used his thigh because of her usual sleeping habits.

“Kkeu-eu~”

Almost at the same time, other Knights began waking up one by one. She hurriedly tried to calm her pounding heart and did her best to look composed as she announced the resuming of their march forward.

“E, everyone, stand up!! We are moving!”



At the end of their lengthy march that lasted over one and a half day, Sae-Jin finally spotted what seemed to be the exit of the cave in the distance.

It was still pitch dark right up until that exit, but he could definitely tell. The space there was considerably wider than compared to the rest of the cave.

Unfortunately, he also sensed a wickedly evil energy in that place at the same time.

It was different from Monsters, but also rather different from humans as well. Instead, he smelled a familiar bloody odour. It was from Vampires.

Sae-Jin stopped his feet. When the Orc's loud footsteps came to a halt, a small commotion developed towards the back.

“Is there... something wrong?”

Kim Yu-Rin asked while cautiously grabbing hold of his arm. Her move was so smooth and natural, Sae-Jin nearly ended up blurting something aloud.

“ ... ”

He managed to shut his mouth and activated the Eyes of the Wolf to the max. Right away, his view expanded greatly until it reached the exit of the cave.

There indeed was a way out over yonder, but a strange old man was blocking the exit while holding a crystal ball and muttering some weird incantations.

But upon closer inspection, that wasn't a real old man, but some kind of a 'doll' that happened to look like one.

<<<<

'... And what the heck is that now?'

Finishing up with his 'surveillance', Sae-Jin moved his gaze towards Kim Yu-Rin who was staring back at him. But since he had no avenue of passing on the information, all he could do now was to simply stare back at her.

"Uh, yes?"

Then, she opened her mouth slightly and tilted her head. That was too damn adorably cute. The simple Orc's instincts kicked in, and he started gently stroking her cheek.

And the jaws of Yi Hye-Rin and Kim Soo-Gyeom who was witnessing this scene from right behind, dropped to the floor; meanwhile, the dazed Yu-Rin's face rapidly became dyed in red colour.

*"...Kheureung..."*

Belatedly realising what he had done, the Orc quickly withdrew his hand and then pointed towards the distant exit with his mace.

"What..."

However, Kim Yu-Rin and the other Knights were way too shocked to figure out what he was trying to say. He even pretended to get peeved and growled a little, but they only seem to get surprised and nothing else.

In the end, the Orc had to take the lead again. And only when the back of the Orc had gotten quite small did the dazed Knights hurriedly chase after him.

“For an Orc, that guy is pretty cool, but still...”

“I said, I know already!! It’s not like that!”

At Yi Hye-Rin’s carefully worded question, Yu-Rin replied back tersely, just as she had done before.

But, strangely enough, her wildly beating heart did not regain its calmness even after a long, long time.



The Knights and the single Orc arrived at the wide open space that led to the exit, but none of them could express their happiness. It was because of the overbearing presence of a puppet-like ‘doll’ that emanated a deeply unsettling energy from its body.

“Even though we can’t use Mana here, but as we still have our weapons, if we attack together from both sides, we might be able to do something,” said Yi Hye-Rin as she unsheathed her longsword.

But the Orc stopped her and took a step closer to the ‘doll’.

These Knights couldn’t use Mana at all. And the opponent this time might have been a doll, but it was also seemingly a clone of a powerful Vampire. Most importantly, however – the desire for battle he had been suppressing until now was reacting with burning fervor, so it was perfect that he would get to fight this *thing*.

The Orc took a single look at the Knights behind him and then pointed at the exit behind the doll with the mace.

And before they could express their emotions...

*“\*SFX for a loud Orcish roar\*”*

...He dashed towards the doll while roaring out powerfully.

Almost immediately, several crimson tentacles shot out from the ground below and grabbed hold of his ankles, but the Orc’s superhuman strength wasn’t just for a show. Using nothing but his raw physical power, the Orc ripped off the binding tentacles and

slammed his mace against the side of the doll.

*Ttaeng!!*

*Kwahang!!*

The Vampire's doll was smashed away like an empty can of soda, bounced around the cave and then, powerfully drilled into the ground.

The Orc pointed at the exit again which was now cleared of all obstacles.

"...Let's go!"

The Knights began to head towards the exit one after the other, with the exception of one person – Kim Yu-Rin.

"Captain, what are you doing?! Please hurry!!"

"Mister Orc, let's, let's get out of here together!"

Yu-Rin hurriedly grabbed the arm of the Orc who was about to rush towards the Vampire's doll.

But before he could respond, the entirety of the cave became dyed in red. And from these crimson walls, several sharp-pointed tentacles rapidly shot out towards the direction of Kim Yu-Rin and the Orc.

It was too late to deflect all of them. The Orc quickly pulled Yu-Rin in his arms and then activated the Leviathan's Scales to absolute max.

Unfortunately, the tentacles managed to penetrate the scales, and the painful sensation of the sharp edges cutting into his flesh crawled up his spine.

"Ahh, damn it... Why! Eu-eu...! Eu-ah...!"

The Orc gazed down on Kim Yu-Rin within his arms. He found it rather pitiable and at the same time, felt grateful, at how hard she was struggling to summon up Mana inside her, wanting to help him out even if it was by a little.

But he judged that this stubborn woman would try to stay here until the end if he let

her be, so he decided to open his mouth to her.

“...You go.”

A voice more manly and burly than humanly possible resounded heavily inside the cave.

*\*SFX for the sounds of energy rising up\**

As Kim Yu-Rin's face became dyed in astonishment, the Vampire's clone began emitting a seriously creepy aura.

“The exit, very long. I stay and block that bastard, until everyone, escapes.”

The Orc spoke up to here and activated the Warrior of Reversal.

This wasn't even some Hollywood action film, but just what kind of rubbish situation did he find himself in? Most of all, the presence of this woman was bothering him a great deal. After all, his heart was roaring wildly inside his chest, and he felt like he might die if he didn't go crazy against that doll bastard right away.

So why the heck was he wasting time talking to this woman?!

“I see, you humans can't use Mana, I think because of the crystal ball. That bastard, absorb that ball into the heart just now.”

The Orc's eyes were now dyed in crimson, and at the same time, equally red and very dense aura started rising up from its body.

“That's why, no Mana, until that bastard dead. You, no useful in this fight. Only a distraction. So, go away, quickly.”

The Orc then grabbed the waist of Kim Yu-Rin, who still hadn't managed to pull herself back together from the shock, and powerfully threw her towards the exit like tossing a javelin.

“Kkyayyak!!” (Kim Yu-Rin)

It seemed that the Weapon Mastery Skill also applied in this case, as the thrown Kim Yu-Rin traced a perfect arc and scored an equally perfect goal inside the exit tunnel.



“Keep running that way.”

At the end of this sentence from the Orc, the entire interior of the cave finished being painted in red.

# CHAPTER 80

## RED MOON (6)

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The wide open area had now become the crimson arena of death; from the red walls, dozens and hundreds of glistening, razor-sharp tentacles exploded out.

Kim Sae-Jin wielded Mana and covered his entire body with it, and then changed its nature to that of ultra-high temperature white flames.

The numerous tentacles that tried to viciously attack the Orc could not penetrate past the protective flames and all melted away well before even touching his scales.

*“\*SFX for the Orc’s roar\*”*

From inside, the Orc’s brutal nature boiled over.

Sae-Jin charged towards the doll with a loud roar. It was the rush of a brightly burning flame that violently shook the cave and stirred the air inside it.

However, even against such a terror-inducing onslaught, the doll didn’t flinch from fear. It only stood there, reciting the chant and getting ready for the next magic spell.

*Ttuokwahng!!*

Arriving right in front of the doll, the Orc slammed down with his mace. Accompanied by a stupendously loud explosion, the murky fog rose up and obscured the surroundings.

The Orc did not let up his assault on the doll even while trapped within this black dust cloud. Using the mace, he shattered the doll’s barrier and then with his bare fist, fed the doll’s head some knuckle sandwich.

*“Kkiick, Kkheck-”*

The doll let out weird noises whenever the fists connected with it.

The Orc continued to one-sidedly clobber the doll, but then suddenly, strange *qigong*

began to gather up on its chest area. (TL: WTF?! Qigong? Really? What happened to Mana? Colour me confused...)

In that very moment, the Orc's intuition rang chilling alarm bells.

But even before he could take a step back, the gathered qigong became an ultra-sharp point of light and pierced his chest.

"Kkeuk..."

The pain was indescribable. However, that pain instead served to awaken the Orc's reckless instincts. His vision became dyed in red, and the muscles on his entire body quaked in pure rage.

[Condition Complete: receive a near-death fatal wound (1/3)]

– To become the Orc Chieftain...

An alert window popped up, but it simply could not enter Sae-Jin's cognition right now.

*\*SFX for a seriously loud Orc's roar\**

Blinded by the heaven-shaking rage, the Orc used up every single potion stored inside via Spiritualisation. His wounds healed up in an instant, and his vitality soared to crazy new heights.



"What are you doing, Captain? Keep on running!!"

Yi Hye-Rin pulled the hesitant Kim Yu-Rin away. Without resistance, she got pulled along by Hye-Rin. It was because of the effect of Skills imbued within the Orc's voice.

Even as the Knights continued to run forward, they could clearly hear the evidence of a fierce battle taking place behind their backs – the sounds of mace destroying something, the dull sounds of heavy fighting – but most of all, the Orc's roar that shook the ground.

Whenever she heard those sounds, Kim Yu-Rin repeatedly looked back while carrying a mixed expression. Yi Hye-Rin had never seen such a longing gaze from Yu-Rin before in the past ten years they'd known each other.

'Isn't this getting way too serious?'

Yu-Rin's peculiar reactions made Yi Hye-Rin frown deeply. Even if Yu-Rin was unfamiliar with the matters of men, but still, just why would she and an Orc, of all things...

*Kwaahaaang!!*

Right then, a white light bloomed up from behind and brightened the interior of the cave. Kim Yu-Rin's feet stopped moving all on their own, but at the same time, the Orc's voice deeply embedded in her mind rang out again.

'Keep running that way.'

And so, she continued to run forward.

After 30 minutes of running, the Knights could finally locate the exit of this goddamn isolation barrier that made them wander around for the past 40 hours or so.

As they escaped from the exit while shouting out in joy, they were greeted by the dense, green forest, with the sunlight broken up by the leaves on tall trees shining on them.

They heard the refreshing chirping of the birds. For the Knights who were trapped in that dank and gloomy cave for the past 40 hours, it was the most welcoming and refreshing noise there could be.

"...By the way, where are we, exactly?"

But even that joy was short-lived. One of the Knights came back to reality quickly, and asked out.

"Ah! Is anyone here still able to communicate with outside?"

Although the leader of this group was originally Kim Yu-Rin, as she was doing nothing but staring at the exit while waiting for someone, Yi Hye-Rin chose to take the lead.

“Please wait a moment!”

A Knight began to rummage through his pocket to produce a crystal ball and a GPS. The GPS didn't work inside the cave, but now it was working just fine.

“Our location?”

“...”

However, this Knight didn't reply and simply gazed at the coordinates shown on the GPS dumbfoundedly.

“What is it? Hey, I said, where are we?!” (Yi Hye-Rin)

The Knight only managed to swallow down his saliva only after hearing Yi Hye-Rin's frustrated shout.

“...We need to get out of here as soon as possible. This place is the deepest part of the Monster field. We're over 50 km away from the 1st defensive line.”

“...”

In an instant, all the Knights' faces crumpled. Yi Hye-Rin let out a long sigh and then grabbed the wrist of Kim Yu-Rin who was still gazing at the cave's exit.

“Let's get out of here. It's dangerous here, Captain.”

“...You're right. Everyone, let's hurry and leave this area.”

It seemed that, even though she was in a dazed state, Kim Yu-Rin still managed to hear what the Knight with the GPS had said, as she resolutely gave out an order. Although there was very little strength behind her voice to call it an order, but still.

And so, the Knights ran with haste to leave the Monster field.

As they were still situated very deeply within the field, many powerful upper Mid Tier Monsters showed up, but well, threats of those levels were easily dealt with by Kim Yu-Rin's attacks.

And her attacks were unusually vicious for some reason.

“...Are you angry?”

Yi Hye-Rin cautiously asked her after a clueless Manticore decided to attack the group and promptly got turned into scraps of meat.

“No. Not at all. Just continue running. There’s no time to waste.”

Kim Yu-Rin spat out before starting her running again. Hye-Rin dazedly watched her back getting gradually smaller before hurriedly following after her.



*“\*Panting... panting... \*”*

Inside the cave where the evidence of fierce battle still remained fresh, Kim Sae-Jin was breathing heavily.

After three hours of intense melee combat and by utilising every single one of Skills beneficial to him in this situation, he finally succeeded in disabling the doll’s operations.

But his sacrifices weren’t small. He just couldn’t figure out what the hell was up with this damnable doll’s durability – if it weren’t for all those potions, he’d have collapsed first from losing way too much blood.

“Heu...”

He shoved his hand into the chest of the destroyed doll rolling around on the cave’s floor. Then he grabbed and pulled out the still-beating artificial heart that felt cold to the touch. From the pierced chest of the doll, blood shot out like a fountain.

Sae-Jin took a probing look at this thing. Even after being separated from the body, it was still somehow continuously beating steadily.

[Artificial Heart] [Item rating: Treasure rank]

– An artificial heart created by taking a human heart and combining it with several hundred Mana Stones of Monsters. It’ll increase the flow of Mana in one’s blood vessels simply by holding it.

– Currently, there are a total of (23/30) magic spells stored within this heart. With enough Mana, it's possible to use the heart as a medium when using magic and it'll be possible to store new type of magic spells.

“...Hmm.”

Now that he had looked at it, there seemed to be a variety of uses for this thing.

As it was made out of hundreds of Monster Mana Stones, absorbing it would cause unprecedented growth in his Stats, or he could use Spiritualisation and store it inside his body which would allow him to use magic.

For now, he stored the heart inside him using Spiritualisation, and began moving towards the exit, as well.



Around the same time.

By fully abusing ‘Mana Movement Technique’, Knights were able to escape from the Monster field in less than an hour.

The final defensive perimeter came into view in the distance. There were black smokes rising as well as the moanings of the wounded everywhere, but the defense operation had already been concluded successfully.

“Uh?! There are Knights approaching us over there!”

Someone shouted out loudly while pointing towards the Knights trudging out from the mountainside. Right away, thousands and tens of thousands of eyes focused there.

“Wow, wowee~. We can finally go home~.”

While checking out Kim Yu-Rin's mood, Yi Hye-Rin stretched her limbs out grandly. Unfortunately, Yu-Rin's gloomy expression showed no signs of abating anytime soon.

“...Uh! That's Order Master Hyun-Seok!!”

Just in time, Kim Hyun-Seok's face could be seen in the distance. Thinking this was a

good chance, Yi Hye-Rin quickly shouted out. Only then did Yu-Rin's stiff expression change slightly.

"He must've been really worried... What are you doing? You should hurry~."

"Eh? Uh? H, hey, wait!"

Hye-Rin didn't miss this chance and forcibly pushed Yu-Rin's back. Although surprised, she still managed to quickly walk towards Kim Hyun-Seok.

"You've safely returned?"

Kim Hyun-Seok smiled softly while looking at her.

"...Yes, sir. All 37 missing Knights, reporting their safe return."

"Well done."

<<<<

Kim Hyun-Seok was worse than a worst miser when it came to praising his own daughter but it was different this time. He didn't lose the smile even for a second as he proudly patted her shoulders.

"Thank you. You worked hard."

"..."

He only spoke two things. But Kim Yu-Rin was extremely moved by the meaning behind those words. Her moist eyes, wet from the emotions repressed within her, clearly demonstrated her current feelings.

"Let us go home." (Kim Hyun-Seok)

Kim Yu-Rin carefully wiped the corners of her eyes and resolutely nodded her head.

"...Yes, sir."





Even after finishing up a press conference, Kim Yu-Rin had to endure the harassment of hundreds of reporters on her way back home.

The questions that didn't deserve an answer were repeatedly asked, and she also couldn't really figure out what they were on about when asking her about a scandal that developed inside the cave.

As expected. She often thought about this, but for her it was far simpler and easier to deal with Monsters rather than reporters.

"...Fuu-woo."

But after she had returned to her empty house, a part of her heart became rather lonesome all of a sudden. Maybe it was because the place was not inhabited for the last ten days, her house felt so cold and empty.

Feeling lonely for some reason, Yu-Rin turned on the tap for the bathtub and to liven up the quietness of the empty room somehow, she switched on the TV.

*– It is now revealed that the one responsible for aiding the escape of the 37 Knights was the Hero Orc.*

"Ah..."

The news coming out of the news channel in that moment was talking about the Hero Orc. And so, Yu-Rin ended up naturally thinking about him again.

However, the Orc was not here with her. Only that, his dignified scent and the manly voice remained clearly in her memories, making her heart ache deeply.

She found herself wondering. Did the Orc safely escape the cave alive? Or did he... fail to do so and perished in the middle of the battle?

"...I want to see him agai... Uh?! Huh?"

After getting utterly shocked by the words involuntarily leaking out of her, Yu-Rin hurriedly covered up her mouth.

– According to the testimonies of the Knights present, the Orc displayed a heroic demeanour by destroying isolation barrier that had trapped the Knights inside, as well as providing sustenance to the starving Knights.

The news broadcast continued on. The memories of yesterday came back to her in full force, when she was still with the Orc inside the cave.

That warm blanket and the delicious food, the firm thigh as well as his gentle touches...

When she remembered up to here, her heart began pounding madly away suddenly.

“...Am I really going crazy?”

She quickly switched the TV off and held her crimson cheeks. Maybe it was her instinctive *hunger* rearing its head with vengeance after 28 years of abstinence or something. But to fall for someone who wasn't even a human... Wasn't that a bit wrong?

*\*SFX for water overflowing off the edge of the bathtub\**

By then, the water began to overflow from the bathtub.

‘Right. Let's just take a bath and cleanse all the weird thoughts out of my head.’

She took off her clothes and headed straight towards the bathroom.

“Oh, that's good...”

Unfortunately for her, even after dipping herself into the suitably warm water, the thoughts of that Orc didn't easily dissipate.

“...Surely, he didn't die, right? After all, he was so strong...”

No, instead, she continued to think about him. The images of Orc's martial prowess back then and his dependable back continued to circle around in her mind.

Feeling frustrated, she closed her eyes shut and sighed out grandly below the water's surface. Bubbles floated up on the water as a result.



One week later.

“It’s not even funny with Yu-Rin Unni’s situation anymore. I mean, she’s loitering around the Hero Orc’s village everyday under the pretext of hunting, you know?”

“...Wow. Seriously?”

At Yi Hye-Rin’s words, Yu Sae-Jung made a surprised face.

“Mm. Serious. Everyday, as soon as she’s done with her duties, she goes there.”

Right next to Yu Sae-Jung, as if his throat was burning up, Sae-Jin was gulping down lots of water. Yu Sae-Jung looked at him confusedly for a moment or two, before seizing this opening by grabbing hold of his hand.

“Oppa, it’s not to your liking?”

“Hmm? Uh... No, it’s nothing.”

Kim Sae-Jin shook his head, while inwardly wondering whether he should show his ‘face’ to Yu-Rin at least once.

“...But what’s the relationship between you two? Are you really dating?” (Yi Hye-Rin)

Yi Hye-Rin’s forehead creased a little as she surveyed the two.

“No...” (Kim Sae-Jin)

At his quick reply, Yu Sae-Jung made an expression of getting really, really hurt by that.

“...Not yet.” (Kim Sae-Jin)

As soon as he added a bit more, her expression brightened slightly.

“But what does that even mean?” (Yi Hye-Rin)

Yi Hye-Rin sharply glared at him with the disbelieving eyes, before giving a serious warning to Yu Sae-Jung.

“Miss Sae-Jung, you gotta be careful now. This is the classic case of leading people on.”

“Yes, I’m aware. That’s why, I’m gonna definitely settle this once and for all later on.”

“Oh, please. Stop. You’re still too young for that.” (Kim Sae-Jin)

As his guilty conscience got poked, Sae-Jin flicked the forehead of Yu Sae-Jung who had made an unnecessary declaration.

“Ouch! What do you mean, I’m too young? I’m an adult now.”

Yu Sae-Jung poured out her complaints. All Sae-Jin could do then, was to chuckle and overlook it.

# CHAPTER 81

## CALM BEFORE THE STORM (1)

---

Deep under the Geumgang Mountain, there existed a Sanctuary belonging to Nosferatus.

“It was beyond our expectations that the entire portal would completely be destroyed... But, somehow, our mission is a success, sir.” (Unnamed Nosferatu)

Unlike those Vampires that had blended into the human society, Nosferatus had a different end goal.

They hadn’t publicly announced it yet in order to avoid the gazes of the omniscient and omnipotent Lord of all Vampires, but the thing was, they did not want to return to their original world.

In a way, it was an expected response from them who were treated with deep disdain and contempt by the rest of the Vampire species.

To them, it was far more preferable to live among the humans and drink animal blood, rather than to suffer a life worse than that of a livestock where one’s neck would be in constant risk of being cut off because of a single mistake.

“Plans are advancing much faster than our expectations. What is the response from the Lord?” (Suterte)

“The Lord is yet to awaken from his hibernation, thus he is not aware of anything, sir.”

So, the leader of the Nosferatus, ‘Suterte’ decided to involve humans so they could disrupt the House of Bathory’s plans to open up a portal back to their home world.

Of course, even he didn’t expect the portal to be thoroughly destroyed like this.

No, what he thought would happen was that, after the event of the Red Moon had ended, the number of Monsters within the Monster field would have decreased rather dramatically, and so, the Knights would take this opportunity to search for their missing colleagues and then, accidentally stumble onto the portal. In case that didn’t happen, then he was planning to let them know anonymously, too.

“On top of this, unlike the Vampire Lord’s original plan, the Bathorys were too impatient. They were thinking of completing everything before the end of the hibernation. That is why they will do everything in their power to make sure none of this blunder will enter the Lord’s ears.” (Unnamed Nosferatu)

Suterte stroked his lengthy beard and harrumphed to himself quietly.

“That’s why we need to be wary of the fury of the House of Bathory, not the Vampire Lord. There should not be any evidence of our involvement behind, but that Bathory woman is a simple-minded moron who moves on nothing but a feeling, after all.” (Unnamed Nosferatu)

“Phew... Seeing such a stupid woman wield so much power, makes me fear just what she might do next. Fine, that’s that but, what is the progress on the order I gave you?” (Suterte)

“Sir. As you’ve correctly predicted, the Bathorys have handed over the information regarding our Sanctuary and its interior layout to the Lycan. However, both the Lycan and the SID have not shown any activity until now.”

“Heummm...”

Suterte fell into a deep thought after listening to the subordinate’s report.

The Lycan – a name he’d never heard before. But in the world of Mercenaries, people changing their names or acting in anonymity were as common as the stars in the night sky. And judging by the unfathomable way his actions had been so far, it was a sure thing that he had an incredible wealth of experience in dealing with such matters.

A Mercenary that possessed abilities to detect the omens of the Red Moon, and to sniff out and murder those hidden Vampires – not just any, but those incredibly dangerous members of the Bathory family only...

“If that’s the case, there’s a chance that the Lycan might have figured out our ultimate goal. At least, he could have determined that we are not a threat for now.”

Suterte let out a weighty exclamation of admiration while thinking, *Really, this Lycan is someone who exceeds my expectations.*

“So, we only have to focus all of our attention on the Vampire Lord who should be

waking up soon.”

The Lord possessed the authority of life or death over all Vampires.

Of course, that didn’t mean the Lord possessed the literal means to control the fates of every Vampire, but it wasn’t too far off that notion since this being could freely control their Vampiric instincts.

“Yes, sir. Understood.”

The subordinate bowed his waist in a disciplined manner before melting into the shadows.



At the same time, the underground training facility of The Monster.

Kim Sae-Jin was going through his daily martial arts training.

“Miss Kim Yu-Rin?”

“...Ah, yes?”

“What are you doing?”

“That... No, it’s nothing.”

Unfortunately, the current state of his tutor was a bit of a mess.

Kim Yu-Rin hadn’t been paying much attention to their sparring session at all, instead choosing to sniff out Sae-Jin’s scent as if to seek out the faint smell of the Orc from him or some such.

Although there were parts that were similar, scents were different in each of his Forms. So, he was not worried about being discovered, but still, this sort of wasting valuable time for training was proving to be somewhat troublesome for him.

“I am really sorry but... is it okay if we end today’s training here?”

Kim Yu-Rin sounded rather miserable while scratching the back of her head. Her

expression right then looked really complicated.

For the past two weeks, the time she spent staring into nothing in a daze increased in frequency. Instead of forgetting about what had happened, her yearning only became deeper and deeper. Her worries of whether this feeling she carried around was a crush or not also deepened as well.

If it indeed was affection, then she had to immediately sever it away.

The reality was not a fairy tale. The beauty and the beast, or more correctly, an Orc and a female Knight. That would never be realised, and it should never be realized as well.

But, just as they said, “belatedly blowing winds are far more terrifying” – until now, she had never found any man interesting, but she couldn’t stop thinking about that Orc.

No, she couldn’t help but to think about him. Whenever she switched on the TV, or when going to her Knights Order, the conversation regarding the Orc continued on, so the memories of back then ended up stimulating her even more...

“...Excuse me, Miss Kim Yu-Rin? Nowadays...”

“N, no, it’s definitely not that.”

She even developed a sixth sense lately, in recognizing what other people wanted to ask her about and then denying it unequivocally.

“ ... ”

“It’s just that, I’ve been mentally and physically fatigued of late. It must be the aftereffects of the Red Moon... I apologise.”

She couldn’t even meet Sae-Jin’s eyes. He wordlessly stared at her for a moment or two, before nodding his head briefly.

“I understand. I guess it can’t be helped, then.”

He sheathed the practice sword back into the scabbard while muttering out.



“...Thank you.”

Kim Yu-Rin too lowered her sword and hurriedly shuffled towards the showers. Sae-Jin looked at her back and sighed out, before shouting at her.

“I will be going ahead. There are matters I need to attend to.”

“Oh, yes. It’s fine.”

He quickly started walking. It was in order to resolve her rather serious ‘lovesickness’, even if it was by a little bit. He already knew where she’d go next. If he waited for her there, she’d show up eventually.



The still-chilly Spring winds brushed past the forest’s vegetation. Kim Sae-Jin the Hero Orc was busy hiding behind a bush, waiting for a certain someone to show up.

*\*SFX for footsteps\**

After waiting for around 30 minutes, he could hear footsteps. The Orc turned his head towards the direction of the sounds.

It was, just as he thought, Kim Yu-Rin.

This woman, who said she was too tired and had ended the two hour training session only after 30 minutes, came here to the Monster field that would’ve made her more ‘tired’.

“Eu-eum...”

Yu-Rin got to the foot of the tall walls of the Orc village, started looking around this way and that.

And then, after making up her mind, she cautiously gathered Mana to her feet...

*Pang!*

...By using an instant combustion, she soared up into the sky and easily jumped over the wall.

“...Huh?!”

By eyeing up a good timing, he planned to show his face to her, but now, he had fallen into a bit of panic here. He sure as hell didn't expect her to be that proactive by actually intruding into the sleeping quarters of a man...

For now, he exited from the bushes and then, decided to wait for her at a suitable distance from the wall, as she'd coming out of the village soon enough.

And so, another 20 minutes flowed by.

He sensed the flow of Mana beyond the wall and right away, a figure of a person soared up past it. Kim Yu-Rin landed softly on the overgrown weeds on the ground.

“Ha-ah...”

It seemed like that she had confirmed the absence of the Hero Orc inside. She spat out a grand sigh containing all her lamentations, before dropping her head low and started walking.

*\*SFX for the sound of rustling winds\**

At the same time, Spring winds blew by. Riding on the currents of air, the scent of the nostalgic past deeply imprinted in her heart tickled her nose.

“...!”

Kim Yu-Rin hurriedly raised her head.

And that's how she finally got to see the Orc she so desperately wanted to meet again.

“Ah...”

Her usually large and clear eyes became twice as big as she ceased all movements, like a still from a paused video. She wasn't even breathing out in this moment.

The Orc ignored her for now and trudged towards the walls.

<<<<

“...Ex, excuse me!”

Figuring that the Orc would walk right past her if she didn't do something, Yu-Rin hurriedly grabbed his arm.

“Ah... y, you managed to make it out alive.”

Her face red like a young girl, both her hands gathered in front of her chest – she cautiously began speaking to the Orc.

Now that she was looking at him, she could clearly feel her heart beating powerfully. They were the heartbeats of emotions that she could barely contain.

“...”

However, the Orc didn't say anything. No, he was simply gazing back at her.

“Uhm, can I... hear your voice one more time?”

They said that the person in need was more desperate. The person in need here was obviously Kim Yu-Rin.

Although she was very earnest in her plea, her actions only made Sae-Jin to cringe inwardly. Without realising it, the corners of his mouth were twitching.

“I'm begging you. Ah, I didn't mean anything by that. It's just that, I'd like to convey my thanks for the time back then...”

Completely unaware of what Sae-Jin was thinking, Yu-Rin was very serious with her plea. Although, no one would be able to figure out how conveying her gratitude and him speaking out had anything to do with each other...

“...Go away.”

That was the first thing the Orc said. At his cold words, Kim Yu-Rin's body shuddered briefly.

She was already expecting it, but now that she had faced rejection, it still hurt. However, despite her hands shaking like leaves, she managed to pull out an item from her Expanding Pocket. It was another Expanding Pocket.

“This... is to show my gratitude.”

“Don’t need it.”

The Orc rejected it bluntly and tried to walk past her. He thought that she should give up if it was this much, but then, she was more tenacious than he bargained for. She powerfully grabbed the Orc’s hand that was as big as her head and forcibly placed it in there.

“I won’t bother you again anymore. You’ll find a lot of potions inside. Please, drink or apply them when you’re injured. Then, I’ll... go away now.”

Her voice was trembling. She lowered her head and turned around to leave, her heart now torn into million pieces after receiving the Orc’s uncaring attitude.

And the appearance of her back weakly walking away looked so pitiful and lonely. The overflowing confidence of the past Kim Yu-Rin was nowhere to be seen.

That was why, the Orc let out a grand sigh, and then called out to her.

“Stop.”

Fortunately, she was a good listener.

He slowly approached the stopped woman, and unfastened the wrist protector made out of corundum from his own wrist.

“Take.”

At a first glance, it looked way too big, but it had an attribute called ‘Auto-Adjust’ that would adjust its size to suit her. The Orc handed the wrist protector over to her.

But she didn’t take it. Only that, her gaze continued to stare downwards, while biting on her lips.

“...”

He wondered if she was too deeply hurt. Even though that was his intention to begin with, but now that he was here, he became somewhat dumbfounded. Just why the heck was this 28 year-old almost-a-spinster acting like a teenage girl having her first

crush...

“Take. Think as reward, for your gifts.”

He spoke up to here and then lifted her chin so she could look him in the eyes. She appeared so vulnerable right then, with wetness pooling around her eyes, making her quite lovely to behold.

The Orc’s consciousness became hazy in that moment, and *the other thoughts* nearly took over, but thankfully, the effects of the libido-limiting potion was still working its magic.

“...Take.”

Just like what she did before, he took her hand and forcibly shoved the wrist protector there. Then, he turned around to leave.

“Excuse me... Will we meet again in the future?”

From his back, the winds carried her meek and hopeful voice over to him.

“No. Don’t come here anymore.”

But the Orc replied in a cold, indifferent manner.

Despite that, she stood there for a long time chasing after his back with her eyes, while clutching the simple-but-tough wrist protector tightly.



“Damn it all to hell!!”

A man wearing a robe angrily slammed down on a desk. The furniture made out of marble split into two under that single fist strike.

“How can our portal collapse suddenly like that?!” (The angry Vampire)

Lady Bathory hated wasting time. On top of that, a rumour speaking of her growing bored of TV began spreading around yesterday as well. In other words, there wasn’t much time left before her harsh scolding would begin in earnest.

“...We also are not... Maybe, the magic spell of the Lich, under the influence of the Red Moon, got mixed up with ours, or it's possible that a third party have gotten in the way.”

“This son of a... What happened to the artificial heart?” (The angry Vampire)

The artificial heart that literally took bloody tears and sweat to create was truly a treasure crafted by the hands of the Vampires. Not only was it valuable all on its own, there was no doubt that it'd become a crucial medium in opening up their portal. It was an item they could not afford to lose or let someone rob them of it.

“We're currently looking for ways of locating it, sir. We suspect that one of the Knights who got trapped there might be in possession of it. For now, we are trying to trace the energy coming off from the heart, but...”

“Fuu...”

Apostle Beren angrily massaged his temples.

And to make things even worse, the crystal rolling on the ground was slowly dyeing in red.

It was the sign that Lady Bathory was calling for him.

## CHAPTER 82

### CALM BEFORE THE STORM (2)

---

Late at night.

In order to experiment with the artificial heart, Kim Sae-Jin headed to the underground training facility below the Society's main building.

"Guild Master?"

However, his heart nearly jumped out of his mouth when he heard a voice that shouldn't have been here in the first place. Quickly shoving the heart inside his pocket, he turned around, trying to look as unflustered as possible.

"...Keum. Mister Joo Ji-Hyuk. You haven't gone home yet?"

"Oh, yes, somehow. This place has got a good environment so, well, I forgot the passage of time while training and ended up falling asleep for a bit here."

Joo Ji-Hyuk pointed towards the 'nap room' and embarrassedly scratched the back of his neck.

"Oh, really? But isn't the Dawn also famous for its great training environment as well?"

"True, but that place doesn't even hold a candle to this place. I mean, there are three Athany dolls here in this training facility, each with different effects, after all... Even if I train here nonstop for 12 hours straight, I feel less fatigued than when I'm training at the Dawn's facility for less than 6."

Sae-Jin nodded his head begrudgingly. Finally, he was able to figure out why all his Society members, even including Kim Yu-Rin who wasn't, preferred to use this place instead of their own Knight Orders' facilities.

"And thanks to this story doing the rounds, there is a bit of chaos unfolding on the pages of the Dawn's community chat rooms, what with people wishing to tour this place. Hahaha."

Joo Ji-Hyuk let out a proud laughter.

“Ah, haha... So, that’s how it is.”

“That’s correct. Well then, I should get going right about now. Take care of yourself, Guild Master.”

Before he knew it, the Society members and the employees changed the way they addressed him, from the Society Chairman to that of the Guild Master.

That didn’t mean that The Monster was approved as a Guild, though. No, instead, thanks to numerous obstructions, his Society got rejected outright after not even being able to enter the upper rankings in the last year’s evaluation.

But the members and employees continued to call him as the Guild Master, probably out of a sense of belonging, or even that of the pride of working in this place.

“Oh... yes, well. Take care.”

In all honesty, Sae-Jin liked this new term, too.

“Will do!” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

After seeing Joo Ji-Hyuk away, Sae-Jin pulled out the artificial heart from his inner pocket once more. The appearance of the heart the size of his palm still beating intermittently remained quite grotesque, even now.

“...Isn’t there something I can do about the look of this thing?”

Even if there were numerous ways of using this thing, as long as it looked this creepy, using it publicly was out of the question.

‘If I decrease its overall volume, maybe I can cover its shortcoming by turning it into an accessory, like a necklace or a ring.’

For now, he decided to worry about that later, and poured in his Mana into the artificial heart. There was a total of 23 magic spells recorded in this thing – and the one he wanted to try out here was...

“Let’s start off with the isolation barrier first.”



As soon as he murmured out, from the ground beneath his feet, a black coloured wave spread out in a circle and dyed the entirety of the training facility in black.

“...Ohhhh.”

He let out a small exclamation. If he used up Mana Stones as base ingredients within this space, then he'd be able to bring forth many different effects, just like how it was back then in that cave. Such as, that bitter coldness, or inability to use Mana, etc.

“Hmm. It's pretty good.”

When he extracted all the Mana from the heart, the barrier disappeared instantaneously.

“Next up is...”

It was time to try out an attack spell. Starting off with, that point of light spell the damnable doll used to pierce his heart with.



Some said that good things could come out from bad situations. It definitely applied to South Korea's case, as the Red Moon proved to be a fortunate event for them in the end.

The reason for the mix-up of Monsters was because of the upheaval of the earth; during this Red Moon, countless Monsters tried to attack the cities, only to run into the defensive cordon – and got themselves promptly killed. That led to the Monster field emptying up, which in turn, gave the government the opportunity to properly divide the areas according to the Monster ranks once more.

All thanks to the Red Moon, of course.

The work dividing the Monster field was carried out quickly.

The Monster Tier separation equipment submitted for evaluation by the Monster defense-related company called ‘TM’ that had appeared quite suddenly, was proven to possess far better performance than already-existing machines. So, the government duly awarded the contract to this new company.

The previous company responsible to installation and management of the existing

infrastructure tried resisting the change by using many dirty tactics, but behind this ‘TM’, there was a giant called the Dawn Corporation, so the whole affair was easily solved in the end.

The Knights found the defeat of the company that continued to exist solely through corruption and solicitation from this incident a wonderful event worth celebrating.

And so, after some time from the end of the Red Moon had passed by, the Monster field was finally reopened.

=====

This is that habitat of the Hero Orcs. Please be careful not to stimulate the Orcs badly. It is possible that consequences will be dire, if some harm is done to the Orcs.

=====

“Hmm...”

While coming out to visit the Hero Orc village located at the corner of the Mid Tier hunting ground during his hunting, Sae-Jin found this signboard out in front.

He briefly wondered if the government had done this, but after a cursory inspection, he found a carefully inscribed Raven Order insignia at the back, which gave him some clues as to who put this thing here.

“...She’s really devoted, isn’t she.”

Sae-Jin slowly shook his head. He did hear that Yu-Rin still came by 2, 3 times a week even now...

*\*SFX for an aggressive barking of a dog\**

It was then. He heard a voracious barking from his back. Not thinking too much about it, he turned around to see what’s what.

A single Monster was glaring at him. A giant bipedal wild dog-type creature, its entire body coated in blackish metal, the so-called ‘Iron Gnoll’.

*\*SFX for yet another aggressive barking of a dog\**

The Gnoll continued to spit out its saliva like an exploding waterfall and got ready to attack, but Sae-Jin simply took a look at this creature, before releasing Mana from his hand.

That Mana noisily vibrated as it rose up on his palm, before changing into a small but ultra-sharp blue dagger.

The Proficiency Level for the 'Mana Body' has risen up quite a bit, allowing him to form such small weapons with his Mana alone. Although its hardness and density fell below that of high grade metals, but still, there were uses for such a weapon.

What played out next was as exactly as recorded within his instincts. Or, was that his Skill, instead?

He grasped this dagger and then threw it towards the Monster. The blade left his hand and drew a blue-coloured trajectory before stabbing the creature's forehead.

*\*SFX for – sigh – yet another aggressive barking of a dog, but shorter\**

If it was any regular human, such a wound would prove to be fatal but the body of a Gnoll was quite hardy. Too bad, the effect of the dagger hadn't ended yet.

Suffering from a heaven-cursing rage, the Gnoll tried to extract the dagger stabbing it in the forehead. But, at that very moment the creature touched the dagger, it reverted to formless Mana and permeated into the open wound.

And so, the Mana that had entered the Gnoll's head, followed Sae-Jin's will to the letter and became a hotly burning flame.

*-Kkeuk!!*

The Monster couldn't even let out a cry in anger before falling dead with its insides thoroughly burnt to a crisp.

This was one of the methods Sae-Jin came up with to utilise the Mana Body.

Although this move could be seen as a one-hit kill attack, it didn't mean he could use this against every Monster out there.

First of all, Monsters ranked upper Mid Tier had this thing called ‘Mana skin’ – like most Knights – which meant their skin and muscles were thickly saturated with Mana. With his current Proficiency Level, he couldn’t even hope to pierce such flesh at all.

As for the Mid Tiers, it still remained a rather inefficient method akin to a cheap trick that would only work on Monsters such as this Iron Gnoll that only had tough exteriors but weak innards.

After the ending this boring hunt, Sae-Jin checked out how much Mana remained within him. Almost half of it was gone. As expected, the Mana expenditure was too great. He should’ve just killed it with his sword or something.

“Hey! It’s over th...”

With a good timing, a hunting party comprising of three people hurriedly arrived on the scene. It seemed they had been chasing this Gnoll down for a while.

“What happened here?”

It was a party of two men and one woman. They confusedly looked at the Iron Gnoll sprawled down on the ground for a short moment. It was understandable, as they couldn’t see any obvious exterior wounds on this Monster.

“...”

In the end, they raised their heads with expressions of utter defeat.

They had been trying to lure this Monster towards their carefully laid-out trap for the last three hours. In other words, this Monster was the entirety of their daily hunting quota...

“...Uh?”

However, the woman Hunter with the worst expression of all, let out a small exclamation of surprise after discovering a man looking at them from beyond the corpse of the Gnoll.

It was the Chairman of The Monster, Kim Sae-Jin.

He was a famous man in the online communities, various Cafes, as well as Social

Networking Sites, well known for his tall height and manly countenance. After all, even she herself was one of his 4 million-strong SNS followers.

Belatedly, the other two recognised him as well, and they slowly approached him with their faces slightly blushed.

“Uhm, hello there, You... are Mister Kim Sae-Jin, yes?”

“Ahh, yes, I am. Hello.”

<<<<

Kim Sae-Jin smiled warmly towards the nervous trio. Maybe it was because the number of strangers recognising him had increased by a great deal, he had gotten used to dealing with people whom he had never met before, but somehow, knew him well.

“Uhm... Ha, have you come to hunt today?”

“Yes, I have. But this Gnoll wasn’t part of the plan. It just jumped at me out of the blue.”

“Oh, that. Actually...”

The Hunters then proceeded to explain what happened in detail.

The Iron Gnolls were known to be particularly strong among the Mid Tiered Monsters thanks to their hardy exterior, and as a consequence, their remains fetched high prices.

So after discovering a lone Iron Gnoll, these three created a trap and tried to lure it there for the past three hours. The Monster was busy chasing them, until it suddenly began sniffing the air, then it changed its direction hastily and ran off to elsewhere.

“...Ah-ha.”

Kim Sae-Jin realised that it was because of his scent.

“So that’s what happened. Then, please take the remains. It’s fine with me.”

Sae-Jin pointed at the dead Gnoll and told the trio to take it with them. The truth was, he must’ve had reached the limit of absorbing Mana Stones for the growth of his Stats, since absorbing one from a Mid Tier Monster would raise only about a few decimal

points at best.

“R, really?!”

The hunting party let out a shout of joy.

“Yes. It’s yours.”

Kim Sae-Jin smiled graciously.

The Hunters carried truly-moved expressions as they bowed their waists 90 degrees four times in a row – before politely inquiring if they could take a group selfie... if it wasn’t too much trouble.

Sae-Jin happily accepted this request as well. And the trio went home very, very satisfied from this encounter with a friendly celebrity.

And exactly three hours after this incident.

As Sae-Jin was about to head home having finished up his work, he got a phone call. It was from Yu Sae-Jung.

– *“Oppa, someone wrote a post about you on SNS and now it’s a big news.”*

“...Huh?”

– *“Everyone is praising you for your nice deeds. You should check it out.”*

“Keheum.”

The life of a celebrity... It seemed that pretty much anything could become a news topic. He logged onto a news webpage while trying to look like he was suffering a bit. However, there was a wide smile pasted on his lips bright enough to light up the heavens.



Before anyone knew it, the sunlight became hotter and the coldness had become a story of distant yesterdays. As Kim Sae-Jin took a walk outside, he could definitely sense the silent encroachment of Summer.

“It sure does resemble a proper theme park, doesn’t it.” (Kim Sae-Jin)

Although Sae-Jin had taken a step back from the Society’s administration, currently he was walking around its grounds with Soh Yeo-Jin in tow after she requested for it.

Originally, this area was too close to the Monster field – less than 40 km – so there were plenty of Knights, Hunters and Wizards around but never a big number of civilians. But now, he could see parents who brought along their children, couples out for a date, and even some folks who were most likely foreign tourists. The size of the so-called floating population had grown enormously.

“Looks like it’s okay for us to stop looking around here.”

“Eh? But we still have other facilities to look at, such as the hotel and the cinema complex? There are lots of people there too, sir.”

Soh Yeo-Jin spoke as she pointed towards the group of buildings over yonder. Sae-Jin carried a light smile as he shook his head.

“I don’t have enough time for that, unfortunately. Besides all that, though – there are truly a lot of people here?”

“I know, right? Maybe it’s because Miss Sae-Jung and Miss Yu-Rin are busy shooting their variety show in here, the number of people coming through has quadrupled compared to last year. If we can grow a bit more, then this area can very well rival the city centre where the Eden Tower is located at in a near future, sir. Honestly, we are the true reason why the real estate prices around these parts have rocketed up, you know~.”

Soh Yeo-Jin’s spoke with lots of pride in her voice.

“Is that so?”

“Yes, sir. Really, we made the correct decision to forcibly increase the Society’s lands. The pure profit alone is so huge...”

He was feeling really great. He was happy in the knowledge that all these lands and buildings were all his.

“Oh, right. What’s the progress on that assignment I gave you?”

He suddenly remembered something else.

The special event for the Orc Blacksmith.

Two months ago, during the fourth night of the Red Moon when the waves of Monsters were still thick and strong.

With his entire Stats boosted by over twice as much under the influence of the Red Moon, Sae-Jin crafted a weapon using the Orc's Smithing Technique. And that ended up becoming an eye-poppingly amazing creation.

Out of all the weapons that could be made by an Orc Great Warrior, this must have been the pinnacle – a longsword that proudly earned the 'Treasure' grade ranking. The name was the Orc's Longsword for now, but he'd be able to change it the moment this sword goes on sale, since the Orc Blacksmith would officially be recognised as a Master craftsman from then.

"Yes, sir. It's going well. We've already began the promotion and the advertisement via Guild's homepage as well as through its SNS profile. Even Miss Sae-Jung and Miss Yu-Rin have mentioned it during the filming of their respective shows. There seemed to be a lot of interest from many Knights, that's for sure."

Kim Sae-Jin nodded his head in satisfaction.

The Orc Blacksmith hadn't produced a weapon in the last three months or so, and people had already begun criticising him from breaking the 'promise' or some such, but he figured that all of them would shut their collective mouths up if he told them this sword was the reason for the lengthy delay.

"That's good. By the way, it seems like the Orc Blacksmith wishes to sell this sword through an auction. What are your thoughts regarding this, Miss Yeo-Jin?"

Sae-Jin wondered just how much this treasure would go for, under the current climate where the inflation had been going through the roof thanks to Monsters' appearance, as well as the advent of mysterious crafts known as Wizardry and Alchemy.

"An auction? Then, there's a chance of another country acquiring the sword..."

In the past, the Orc Blacksmith got a lot of flak for selling a Branded Goods-graded item to another country. But this time, this weapon was something that might not be



seen in another hundred years, something on the level of being a ‘cultural asset’.

Naturally, Soh Yeo-Jin got cautious as she thought about the kind of calamity that could unfold when this weapon got taken by another country...

“The Orc specifically requested for it. Since things have come this far, he said it’d be better to spread our name internationally. I hear the best Blacksmith in the world is still a person named Hepaitos? We should help the Orc take away that title, don’t you think?”

Kim Sae-Jin smiled faintly.

# CHAPTER 83

## CALM BEFORE THE STORM (3)

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[Will you evolve into the Lycanthrope Form?]

Kim Sae-Jin in his Athany Form was floating on the water filling up his bathtub, with his gaze firmly focused on the alert window, currently superimposed on the ceiling.

The Lycanthrope.

At first, it was his end goal. But now, this thing where he couldn't readily decide on what to do next, had become the proverbial Pandora's Box.

*"Kkeeing..."*

There were two big reasons why he was so reluctant to evolve into the Lycanthrope.

First of all, there was a high possibility of his outward appearance changing after his Human Form and the Wolf Form merged.

Up until now, the Human Kim Sae-Jin's face remained broadly the same as before, but due to the qualities of a Wolf slowly encroaching on him, certain facial features did sharpen up a bit. But if he chose to become the Lycanthrope, he just could not tell how his face might look like afterwards.

Right now, he had made many personal connections. If he went ahead with the evolution and his appearance changed way too dramatically compared to the Kim Sae-Jin of now...

Now that would be the worst of all the terrible calamities he could potentially face.

Second problem was the racial tendencies of the Lycanthrope.

The Lycanthropes of the legends were infamous for their hot-blooded and violent tempers. So much so, they were even treated as the 'talking Monsters' by the fellow Soo-ins.

If he were to win against such instincts, at minimum, the Human Kim Sae-Jin had to level up not only his physical strength, but his mental resistance as well – the so-called ‘mentality of a human’.

*“\*Phew~ phew~\*”*

Sae-Jin shot out water gun out of his mouth. The spouts of water drew a straight line as they hit the ceiling where the alert window was superimposed on.

Leveling up this Athany Form could also be one of the ways to balance out the Lycanthrope Form as well. However, the risk associated with evolving this Form was far greater than any other Forms.

One just had to think about the real Leviathan that was currently roaming out in the expansive Atlantic Ocean, or taking a nap under a tremendously great depth.

The flow of time, the currents of the oceans, the blazing sun – all the things and elements provided by the mother nature became the foundation of this creature’s strength, which made the ranking of a Leviathan as ‘unclassifiable’. It wasn’t an exaggeration to call the Leviathan ‘a dragon of the seas’.

Kim Yu-Rin could somehow contend with the Leviathan that had appeared in the Han River of Seoul only because the summoning process had greatly limited its overall might. If it appeared in the middle of the city without being summoned, but by its own volition...

Then Seoul would’ve become nothing more than a collection of collapsed rubble by now.

‘... Now that I think about it, my body has grown a little, hasn’t it?’

As he was thinking about Leviathan-related matters, he suddenly came to a realisation. Was it because Athany was the so-called growth-type Monster that leveled up simply with the passage of time while being in contact with any form of moisture? The bathtub had definitely gotten smaller for his body compared to before.

*“Kkeung.”*

Feeling rather uneasy about this development, Sae-Jin quickly changed back to Human Form and left the tub.

He took a glance at the clock – it said 11AM. The scheduled time for training was almost here.



Ever since the Red Moon concluded, Kim Sae-Jin concentrated on training that would level up his Human Form.

Under the advent of the Red Moon, the Orc Great Warrior's instincts had become harder to control, that was why – but also, he was mindful of the undecided evolution towards the Lycanthrope as well.

The sword training was easy. His Weapon Mastery was now at the level of a 'High Class User', so there weren't too many Knights who could contend with him on that regard.

Every Knight praised Sae-Jin for being a genius with the sword, even saying things like he'd have been the world's greatest swordsman if he was born in the middle ages or something.

Even learning 'martial arts' for the first time in his life proved to be easier than expected as well. The 'Warrior's Special Quality' had gifted him with instincts on how to move his body efficiently; many martial art techniques such as breaking the fall, feet movement, hand to hand combat, etc, etc., were deeply ingrained within his body already.

As far as his physical body was concerned, it was pretty much perfect, leaving Mana as his only problem to tackle.

It was incredibly important to start the education on how to use Mana very early in one's life. No matter how much potential one had, 'they' said that if the 'golden time' of around 5~6 years of age was missed, that person would never ever be able to store Mana in his or her body – so, for someone like Sae-Jin who was in his 20s already, the concept of him storing Mana within his body was a hugely difficult prospect, even if he cheated a little with his Trait sometimes.

The idea was as impossible as trying to grasp a passing cloud, and just as ambiguous and intangible as the fading morning fog.

So, in order to overcome this shortcoming of his, he asked Hazeline for a favour, who

just so happened to be an A-ranked Wizard in her spare time. With her readily agreeing to it, a new schedule for 'Mana Tutelage' was set up, the lessons happening on every second week of a month on the days of Friday and Saturday.

"Close your eyes, and try to receive Mana into your body. *Shuwook- Shuwook-*"

Inside the members-only training area.

While sitting in the lotus position, Sae-Jin's eyes were closed as he repeatedly breathed in and out deeply.

This was a part of the Mana-related lessons, focusing on increasing the amount of usable Mana in him.

*"Shuwook- Shuwook-"*

"Please continue 'shuwook, shuwook' repeatedly."

"...Will this really work?"

Unfortunately, Sae-Jin's suspicions remained unanswered. He had been doing nothing but *shuwooking, shuwooking* for the past 30 minutes, after all.

"Just as do as you're told, please. This is a test to see how good your affinity with Mana is."

Too bad for him, Hazeline was adamant with her orders.

"...Really? If that's the case, then... *Shuwook~, shuwook.*"

Sae-Jin resumed this sort-of-but-not-really meditation technique slash breathing thing.

And so, he repeated this for countless dozens of times until Hazeline lightly tapped on his shoulder to signal the end of the exercise.

"That's enough. The concentration level of Mana in your breaths is equivalent to that of a low Mid Tier Knight."

"Huh?"

He momentarily got shocked. Even if he knew that the Stat values for the Magic Strength and Mana Affinity were inferior to his Physical strength-related Stats, wasn't this unexpectedly low? He honestly thought it was at least at the level of a Mid Tier...

"...What's up with that expression? A High Tier Hunter would never possess the equivalent Mana level of a Low Tier Knight no matter how hard he tries. In other words, it's already very impressive that your level approaches that of a low Mid Tier Knight. Well then, shall we start with the real training now?"

As soon as Hazeline finished speaking, she activated a spell even before Sae-Jin had gotten ready.

"@#\$%?!?!" (Kim Sae-Jin)

In the blink of an eye, an overbearing current of Mana was generated, and began powerfully pushing down on Sae-Jin's seated body.

"Perform push-ups under this pressure, please. I know it's tough, but it can't be helped, you know? After all, this is the only method left for someone like Mister Sae-Jin, who has missed his ideal time for Mana training by a span of decades, to increase his overall Mana capacity, even if it's only by a little."

When Sae-Jin could only whimper under the pressure, unable to reply back, she withdrew the Mana pressing down on him – at least for now.

"Please listen well. The concentration level of Mana in here is very high because of the Athany doll and a Mana Spring, right? And I'll be compressing the Mana in the air and press it down on you. So, even if it's for a short while, doesn't that mean that you, Mister Sae-Jin, will be receiving the 'love' of Mana present in the air with all of your body, no?"

Hazeline brightly smiled and swung her arms around in circles. Since that looked like her loosening up before activating her spell again, Sae-Jin became tense once more.

"And when you sweat during an exercise while being subjected under this kind of situation, your sweat pores will open up wide and through those open pores, Mana will enter your body. It'll also become easier to absorb Mana when muscles are working, too. Of course, 99% of the Mana will leave your body again, but still, your Mana reserve should increase this way even if it would only be a little bit. So now, please take off your clothes."

“Eh? Why... my clothes?”

Seeing Sae-Jin covering up his chest by crossing his arms and pretending to be embarrassed, Hazeline frowned deeply.

“Please stop fooling around. It’ll be easier to absorb Mana with less layering of clothing, you see. You also know that air can’t easily pass through fabrics. There’s a big difference.”

“...Well, I get that, but...”

“Please hurry up. I’ll get angry if you don’t listen to the teacher, you know? I came here after answering Mister Sae-Jin’s earnest plea, but it’ll become troublesome if you’re being uncooperative. I mean, do you have any idea how much is the fee for a tutelage by an A-ranked Wizard?”

Hearing all this, Sae-Jin carried a complicated expression as he began unzipping his top.

“...Even my pants?”

“...I’ll let you keep that on, so for now, take off your T-shirt as well.”

He really did feel somewhat embarrassed, but he removed the shirt in the end. His battle-hardened, perfectly shaped and tight muscles revealed themselves in all their glory.

“...Hmm. Hm, hmm...”

Hazeline’s cheeks slightly reddened as she took in the sight of his broad shoulders, well-built chest, clearly-defined eight pack, and the lower abdominal muscles.

“M, must be thanks to your Trait, since your body looks nice.”

Although she tried to sound normal, in all honesty, his body was already well past the level of being ‘nice’.

By using her Trait called ‘Eyes of the Wizard’, she could easily tell. As exactly as these words meant, Sae-Jin’s body was as close to as being perfect as possible, something not even Knights training for the rest of their lives might achieve.

Although the amount of Mana circulating within his body was low, the ‘quality’ of it was very high.

“...Keum.” (Kim Sae-Jin)

“What are you doing? Why aren’t you getting ready?”

The embarrassed Sae-Jin hurriedly got down to the push-up position as soon as she spoke. When he did, those already well-defined muscles on his shoulders and that broad back stood out even more.

<<<<

Hazeline tried her best to avert her gaze, but because she was still a member of the female species, she couldn’t completely prevent her eyes from taking several quick glances.

“...I’m activating the spell. Please, try you best.”

“Yes... @\$%!!”

Again, before he got properly ready, an overwhelming atmospheric pressure pressed down on his back. However, he still began the push-up while gritting his teeth. Only ten seconds had passed by, but his arms and legs were already shaking around like leaves and sweat drops were pouring down like a waterfall.

“One.” (Hazeline)

Hazeline counted for him, but it didn’t enter his ears. Whether this was his first or second, he couldn’t tell, nor did he wanted to know.

“This... f\*\*\*ing...”

The only words leaking out of his mouth were nothing but curses.

“Stop cursing.”

“Kkeuck...”

After hearing him swear out, Hazeline actually increased the severity of the spell.



“Now then. Let’s do the second one, shall we? But when can you do it? Do I have to wait for an hour?”

“...Kkeu, euh euh...”

While hearing her ridicule, Sae-Jin continued to exert all of his strength.



[‘Magic Strength’ has increased by 2. ‘Mana Affinity’ has increased by 1.]

This was the result of today’s training.

Kim Sae-Jin smiled brightly as he lay on the floor, roughly huffing and puffing. It was seriously a wonderful result. After all, this much increase was equal to absorbing dozens of Mid Tier Mana Stones. It was the right decision to ask for Hazeline’s aid.

“ ... ”

However, the actual person who helped him achieve this growth, Hazeline, was carrying quite a complicated expression. She wasn’t sure how, but the amount of Mana now staying in his body easily exceeded her initial estimates.

In truth, this was an inefficient method that had a clear dead end. To use an analogy of a person’s height, it was similar to trying to locate the ‘hidden height’ by correcting the bone structure of a person who had already stopped growing.

‘... But seriously, just what kind of a body is this greedy for Mana?!’

Normally, about 50% of the Mana existing in the air would enter a person’s body. But then, 99% of that would escape back out so, theoretically, only around 0.5% should remain inside that person’s body.

But when peeking into Sae-Jin’s body, over 25% of the Mana entering his body remained behind. No, it was more like being ‘captured’ – by the Mana already existing within his body.

‘Is it also because of his Trait?’ (Hazeline)

She couldn't get a bead on just what kind of Trait he had. If Mana continued to remain in his body without limit, then within a year, he'd even leapfrog her in terms of overall Mana reserve...

"...Mister Sae-Jin. Is your body feeling okay?"

"Ah, yes, of course. Miss Teacher."

"The results are pretty good, right? Well then... can you stand? Why don't we go and eat something?"

Hazeline smiled bitterly as she offered her hand. Feeling satisfied, Sae-Jin was about to grab the offered hand.

But then...

"Oppa, are you he...?"

Yu Sae-Jung arrived at the training facility with a spooky good timing.

She began alternating her gaze between Sae-Jin who was covered in buckets of sweat, and a surprised woman who was hurriedly pulling the robe to hide her face.

"...Uhm... You came early today?"

There was still an hour left until their promised time...

Kim Sae-Jin picked up his article of clothing and began putting them on, all the while looking at Yu Sae-Jung with a slightly stupefied expression.



"The tracing is complete, sir. The current location of the artificial heart is inside the city near the Monster field in Gangwon Province, within the grounds of 'The Monster'."

"...How troublesome. Does the Society Chairman, who is supposedly in cahoots with the Lycan, have the heart?"

The Apostle Beren let out a frustrated groan after hearing the subordinate's report.

“We’re not sure of that, sir, but the likelihood of that is very high.”

Beren roughly massaged his temples. To think, the item they had to recover at any cost was unexpectedly in the hands of a big fish...

“...What are your orders, sir?”

The ‘friend’ of Lycan. His job description, ‘Chairman’ of the Society, The Monster – this man named Kim Sae-Jin was an important enough individual that even made the Apostle of the House of Bathory hesitate.

“For now... keep him under surveillance. It’s possible that the Lycan is protecting him, so use pawns for this purpose.”

“Yes, sir. I understand.”

The short answer from the subordinate echoed in the empty room.

## CHAPTER 84

### INTENSIFICATION (1)

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“...”

Yu Sae-Jung continued to move her gaze between Kim Sae-Jin and the unknown woman. Within her trembling eyes, many emotions such as fear, anger, irritation, anxiety, dumbfoundedness, etc. etc., tumbled around in a wild mess.

Sae-Jin hurriedly put his clothes back on and walked towards her.

“...Hey, you should greet her. This is...”

He paused his words there. He wanted to acquire Hazeline’s permission first.

“It’s fine.”

Hazeline nodded her head firmly.

“Wha, what’s fine?”

Unfortunately for Yu Sae-Jung, this entire situation was just a big messy ball of confusion. Just what kind of introductions would require an okay from the other party first...? She knew she was worrying about nothing here, but still, she couldn’t help but feel nervous.

“So, the thing is, this person is...”

“No, wait!! Stop, stop right there!!!!” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Yu Sae-Jung shouted out and stopped Sae-Jin. She felt like she needed time to ready her mind, if it was to calm her erratically beating heart...

“...This person is Miss Hazeline. You also know her too.” (Sae-Jin)

Good thing, then, Sae-Jin didn’t feel like extending the duration of her misunderstanding.

Yu Sae-Jung’s body trembled for an imperceptible amount of time, before she began

remembering the name Hazeline – only then did she let out a sigh of relief as she nodded her head.

“Oh. Wowee... Yes, of course, I know. I know well...”

Her eyes that were shaking in anxiety had now recovered some stability.

Sae-Jin chuckled slightly, and then said...

“She’s our fellow Society member, so isn’t it okay?”

...While gently gazing at Hazeline with an amiable smile.

“...Well. I’ve made many written communications with Miss Sae-Jung, so...”

Hazeline nodded her head in reluctance before removing her hood. Yu Sae-Jung became incredibly stunned, then. As expected of an Elf, her face was eye-searingly beautiful – but her skin was pure white, unlike how a Dark Elf should be. Before such an absolute beauty, Sae-Jung found herself shrinking away in awe.

“It’s our first time meeting face to face, yes? It’s a pleasure, Miss Sae-Jung.”

Hazeline reached out with her hand for a shake. Feeling slightly inferior, Sae-Jung carefully held that hand.

“...As expected, your beauty is befitting that of an Elf.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Receiving that bitter praise, Hazeline assumed a wry smile as well.

“I was training until now. Miss Hazeline decided to help me out.”

Kim Sae-Jin didn’t like the depressed expression of Yu Sae-Jung, so he deliberately placed his arm around her shoulders and gently pulled her in closer.

It was definitely ‘gently’.

But Yu Sae-Jung dived into his arms as if she was being shoved by a tornado or something.

“...Y, you two seem *really* friendly.”

At this sudden embracing, Hazeline became flustered and scratched the back of her neck.

“Ah, that... Actually, we’re really, really close. And there’s a plenty of future potential for us t...” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Kim Sae-Jin quickly covered up her mouth, after realising she was saying weird stuff that was obviously trying to ward Hazeline off of him.

“...Our relationship is like that of a friendly older brother and younger sister.” (Kim Sae-Jin)

Meanwhile, Yu Sae-Jung bit into his palm in irritation.



[The Orc Blacksmith, now registered as the 18th Master Craftsman of South Korea.] [A genius who has become a Master only after debuting 2 years ago; many overseas Knights Orders send their congratulations.] [The weapon that has elevated the Orc as the Master, will be auctioned off on June 1st in Hyunwol Auction House. Total of 200 Knights Orders from over 100 countries request for the participation of the auction...]

“How chaotic.”

Smiling in satisfaction, Sae-Jin lowered the newspaper on top of the desk. Newspapers from not only Korea, but also from Spain, the USA, the UK, China, Japan as well as countless other countries could be found on top of his desk.

The languages might be different, but their headlines were remarkably similar. All of them were about the Orc Blacksmith becoming a Master Craftsman, and the words printed within were busy expressing their curiosity towards the ‘Treasure’ graded weapon he had crafted.

...At least, that’s according to Soh Yeo-Jin, who happened to be quite proficient in several languages.

“Yes sir, it is getting really hectic out there. We even received official diplomatic documentation from several Asian and Western European countries for their Prime Ministers and Presidents who are planning to attend the auction itself.”

“Really? That’s amazing.”

“Well, since it’s a Treasure-graded item we are talking about, I think this is only normal, sir. I mean, it’s a first one to appear in Korea for over 30 years, you know? He must be a true genius, this Mister Orc Blacksmith.”

Kim Sae-Jin did his best to stop his shoulders from straightening out after hearing Soh Yeo-Jin’s praises.

“Keum... That’s how it is?”

“But of course~.”

Just as Soh Yeo-Jin smiled brightly and nodded her head, the voice of his PA leaked out of the Society Chairman-exclusive phoneline.

– *Mister Chairman. Miss Shenarine the Wizard has called in to say that she’ll be arriving on the premises shortly.*

“Oh. Looks like it’s time for your training. Then, I should return to my duties as well~.”  
(Soh Yeo-Jin)

Soh Yeo-Jin grinned brightly and left his office. Sae-Jin yawned and stretched his limbs out wide, before he got up from his seat as well.



Before going to the training facility, he stopped by the Society’s members-only cafeteria. Maybe it was because this was during lunch time, there were quite a few people here.

Kim Yu-Sohn’s son, Kim Seon-Ho, was carefully feeding his young daughter some baby food, while Yi Hye-Rin was looking at that scene with adoring eyes. Joo Ji-Hyuk was deeply immersed in the novel he was reading, while Yu Sae-Jung was busy typing on the keyboard of a notebook PC while wearing a pair of glasses.

‘She said it was a group project for school, so it must be a lot of work.’

Everyone looked occupied with something. And out of them, the only one remaining with some leeway who could lessen his boredom was...

“I see that you’ve come again.” (Sae-Jin)

“Hmm? Ah, yes. Hye-Rin asked me to come along, so I, uh... ended up relying on you again. The food tastes really nice here, which is as expected.”

...That person was Kim Yu-Rin, who was already halfway to the dreamland before he interrupted her nap time.

“Well, it’s true that our cafeteria is famous for its delicious food.”

After all, Sae-Jin only hired those chefs with great potential, so it was par for the course, really.

“...Of course.”

Kim Yu-Rin subtly tried to read Sae-Jin’s mood while avoiding making a direct eye contact. Maybe because she knew that she was not the member of his Society.

“It’s fine. You don’t have to be so tense like that. You are contracted with the Monster Entertainment, so you can come as often as you’d like.” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin assumed a wily smile after sitting down before her.

“Oh... Thank you. So, will it be alright for me to trouble you in the future as well?”

“Mm? Oh, of course.”

He figured that she was referring to the Society’s training facility. He had witnessed Yu-Rin loitering out in front of the HQ building more than once, whenever her acquaintances – Yi Hye-Rin or Yu Sae-Jung – weren’t around.

“...By the way...”

Kim Sae-Jin took a glance at the wrist protector mounted Yu-Rin’s arm. She saw the direction of his gaze and slowly hid the arm below the table.

“So, that’s ‘that thing’? The one given by the Hero Orc.”

“...Did Hye-Rin tell you about it?”



“She did.”

Kim Yu-Rin let out a lengthy groan.

“...Yes, the Hero Orc gave it to me.”

“May I touch it?”

Sae-Jin reached out with his hand while speaking to her. However, Kim Yu-Rin promptly and swiftly turned away to the other side and shook her head slowly.

“Nope.”

“...You like that Orc that much?”

“T, that’s not true!! Not true at all!! It’s just... a present, is all. You are not supposed to touch someone else’s gifts willy-nilly.”

“Hmm...”

Sae-Jin stared at her and feigned dissatisfaction for a bit, while rubbing his chin. Then, a *very* good idea popped up in his head.

“...Do you want me to help you and set up a meeting with him?”

At his truly unexpected question, her eyes became super wide.

“Eh? W, what are you saying...?”

“It’s just as I said. I told you that I can ‘converse’ with Monsters. That’s how I got to be friendly with the Hero Orc...”

When he spoke up to here, he could see Kim Yu-Rin visibly swallow down her saliva.

“But well, just because I make a request, that doesn’t mean it’ll happen... but surely, the possibility should be high?”

Of course, there would be a catch.

“If Miss Yu-Rin joins my Society, then maybe, just maybe... Maybe I can summon forth

the Hero Orc at least once every couple of weeks...”

Kim Sae-Jin smiled evilly as he studied reactions in Yu-Rin’s eyes.

And they were shaking uncontrollably.

However...

“...I can’t. And I shall repeat this point once more. I’m not feeling any affection towards the Orc. If anything, then it’s simply the emotion of camaraderie between comrades who had battled together. After all, does the notion of a human liking a Monster even make sense?”

She continued to strongly deny everything.

“...Yes, I understand. Well... if you change your mind later on, let me know, please.”

She was like an impregnable fortress. Feeling his stubbornness act up, he even thought up some really naughty things, such as appearing before her as the Orc and fan the flames of yearning in her heart or something.

Right then, his phone rang loudly.

It was from Hazeline.

Suddenly remembering the complicated history between Yu-Rin and Hazeline, Sae-Jin carefully exited the cafeteria.

But before that...

“Miss Yu-Rin, since you refused to join my Society, you are forbidden from entering the training facility today. No ifs or buts, please.”

“Huh?! No, wait, I didn’t come to train... I understand...”



‘... Don’t wanna help him anymore.’

Hazeline pouted as she looked at the training Kim Sae-Jin who was exercising like

there's no tomorrow.

In all honesty, she didn't want to help him. Of course, she was very much grateful for what this man, Kim Sae-Jin aka the Goblin Alchemist had done to make her a real, super important big shot in the world of Alchemy. It was hard to quantify just how grateful she was.

However, she couldn't help but feel intense jealousy at this unfair situation. It truly was a deplorable behaviour, but what could she do?

Wizards were originally the type of 'animals' that were full of petty jealousy, envy, ostracisation of others better than him or her, as well as desires to monopolise. On top of this, the level of pride they had in their reserve of Mana was on another plateau altogether.

And not to forget, although she had taken half a step away from that profession, Hazeline was still a Wizard, through and through.

She had never ever even heard of, or experienced, such a wondrous growth potential before. Her Mana reserves increased only after she had to go through training that literally made her sweat blood drops, until her bones felt like they were breaking under the strain.

<<<<

But this man, in probably over a year's time... no, maybe even less than that. In half a year's time, she estimated that this man would possess more Mana than her if this rate kept up.

It was the difference of such a fraudulently unfair talent, or his Trait, and herself.

"Huu-Euph!!"

However, Sae-Jin was totally oblivious to her uncomfortable state of mind and concentrated solely on his training. At first, it was seriously tough, but now that a month had passed by, it had gotten much easier. The refreshing sensation of Mana permeating throughout his body was more than enough to offset the pain from the harsh training.

'This just doesn't make sense. How can the rate of his increase in Mana absorption

actually be higher than last week?!' (Hazeline)

Normally, when a person absorbed a certain amount of Mana during a day, he or she'd be able to absorb just a bit less on the following day – because the space in one's body to store up Mana was limited. But it was not the same with this man.

Her face became nearly tearful after wondering why he was the only exception to this rule.

"...So, uh, shall we stop here for today?"

Hazeline stomped her feet on the ground in vexation and spoke to him.

"No way... I can... push myself... a bit more..."

He gritted his teeth and succeeded in doing one more push up.

"..."

Hazeline shut her mouth in anger. Meanwhile...

[‘Magic Strength’ has increased by 2. ‘Mana Affinity’ has increased by 1.]

...Only when alert windows such as this one floated up to his view a couple more times did he stop his training while feeling rather satisfied by the result.



The training lasted for three hours. During that time, Yu Sae-Jung went home after saying she needed to get ready for the following day's 'presentation', while Joo Ji-Hyuk went out on a date with Yi Hye-Rin.

"Let me take you home."

Currently, they were in the parking lot. Sae-Jin opened the car's door as he spoke.

"Hmm... Alright."

Hazeline deliberated for a bit before nodding her head. She figured that it was better to get a free ride home, since she felt a bit light-headed from helping him out in his training – although it looked simple from outside, it nevertheless required a good deal of Mana from her.

“Please get in.” (Sae-Jin)

Hazeline climbed into the passenger side, and Sae-Jin got behind the wheel.

As they drove, they talked about this and that. Most of them were about Yu Sae-Jung and The Monster, though.

“Miss Sae-Jung, she’s really cute, isn’t she? She’s been messaging me all the time, asking me what I’ve been doing lately, and then, just drops out of the conversation for no reason. So, I thought about this for a while, trying to figure out what she wants. And I think she’s trying to warn me off you.”

“She’s doing what?”

“Well, whenever she can’t contact you, it’s like, she’s thinking that maybe you’re spending time with me instead, so she’s sending those text messages to probe me.”

Kim Sae-Jin shook his head wryly.

“Eiii, no way.”

“Eiii? It’s the truth, you know? You know what’s the first thing written on her texts? ‘Unni, what are you doing right now?’ Or, it’s ‘Are you meeting someone right now?’ It freaks me out sometimes... So, please treat her a little bit better. She seems to like you really a lot.”

Just as when Sae-Jin glanced over at her direction with a smile...

The Wolf’s intuition ran an alarm bell immediately.

In an instant, his perception of time slowed down, and the world began flowing much more slowly.

A formless matter was suddenly crashing into the side of his car. He couldn’t tell what it was, whether it was a magic spell, pure Mana, or even an Undead. Kim Sae-Jin

slammed down on the brakes and then, he pulled Hazeline into his arms in haste.

Within this slowed perspective of time, he could clearly decipher every little bit of changes in her expressions.

It sure was fun to look at, but he couldn't focus on that right now.

He quickly extracted Mana from his body, and then formed a thin membrane from it which wrapped around them. As soon as the blue and circular membrane finished forming...

Right then.

With a violent impact, the car was flung high into the air. And on top of the airborne vehicle, enormous 'darkness' poured down.



"...Are you unhurt?"

Inside the blue-coloured Mana membrane, Sae-Jin lightly grasped her shoulders and shook her. Frowning heavily, she massaged the back of her neck while slowly nodding.

"I'm more or less okay, but which sons of f\*\*\*ing b\*\*\*hes did this?"

"..."

Sae-Jin became speechless after hearing her *rough* words.

Just in time, they could hear the footsteps just beyond the Mana membrane.

"They're coming." (Hazeline)

Hazeline angrily gritted her teeth and began summoning Mana from her body.

"Hey, can you do something about this?" (Hazeline)

She then asked Sae-Jin while tapping his Mana membrane.

"...Oh. Please wait a moment."

Since Sae-Jin had never seen her this furious before, he went into maximum respect mode and politely opened up a hole in the membrane for her.

The first thing they saw was the violently twisted wreckage of the car's chassis.

“—.”

Hazeline closed her eyes and recited an unidentifiable chant.

*Ttaaaaaaang!!!!*

Right away, an enormous thrust of air exploded out through the open gap of the membrane and flung away the car's chassis.

“It's done. Undo the whole thing.”

“Ah, yes.”

As he undid the membrane, Hazeline let out a low sigh as she exited out of the partial destroyed car.

“...Come out. Who are you? Show yourselves right now, or I'll burn you alive.”

Hazeline's cold voice resounded from the middle of the empty road.

As if reacting to her provocation, a figure of a person emerged from the darkness that had descended in front of the car.

“Hey you, you must be out of your mind. Don't you think this is too much for a pran...”  
(Hazeline)

But it wasn't just one person. Two, three, four, five, six... until there were eight of them. With the sudden entrance of these eight mysterious beings, Hazeline became slightly more serious as she licked her lips.

“...So, you came prepared. Who sent you? Did the Triads send you?” (Hazeline)

It seemed that she was seriously mistaken about something.

“...From the Mafia? Right. I thought as much.” (Hazeline)

# CHAPTER 85

## INTENSIFICATION (2)

---

Kim Sae-Jin slowly approached the back of Hazeline who was busy glaring at the nine humanoid figures covered in a veil of darkness, her current face stiff. Sensing his approach, she extended her arm out and stopped him there.

“...I’m sorry, Mister Sae-Jin. This is all because of me. I’ll finish this up as soon as possible, so please, take a step back.”

“No, wait a min...”

“Hush. Be quiet now.”

Her misunderstanding continued on as she began drawing deep breaths.

“Since you didn’t react, I guess you’re not from the Mafia, either? Then, maybe you’re from Yakuza?” (Hazeline)

There was no reply this time as well. It was obvious why – they were not ‘human’ to begin with. Their rotten smell of blood tickling Sae-Jin’s nostrils proved that much.

“...”

Without replying back to her, all nine of them began chanting a spell at the same time. Seeing this, Hazeline bit her lip and then, chanted her own spell as well.

Right away, black-coloured lava powerfully rose up behind her, before forming a massive, lengthy spear that buzzed noisily while floating in the air. Near the constantly burning surface of the spear, space seemed to distort around as the air itself was busy melting all around it.

It was the Mana Spear.

The spell where its caster formed a spear with Mana, its sole purpose was to destroy and kill its target. Rated as one of the highest-class attack magic spells, not only the caster needed to pour in a great deal of Mana, he or she also needed to possess



excellent Magic Strength – ability to control Mana – in order to maintain the shape of the spear as well as its elemental properties.

This spell was powerful enough to be used as the greatest trump card that could theoretically contend against a true dragon, depending on the ability of the caster.

“If you’re scared, then you better get lost now. I do not wish to worsen our relationship any further than it already is. If we can resolve this with dialogue, wouldn’t it be simpler for both of us that way?”

Hazeline confidently grinned, as the Mana Spear split into nine and targeted all nine figures while buzzing in the air.

That grin could last only for 10 seconds.

The reason for that was the strange ‘wave’ spreading out from beneath the feet of the Vampires. Spreading around like a raging black torrent, this wave thing reached out until arriving at a certain diameter, then rose up in a dome shape, separating and enclosing the space they were in from the rest of the world.

This was a spell Sae-Jin was quite familiar with: the isolation barrier.

“...Huh?!” (Hazeline)

Of course, as an A-ranked Wizard, Hazeline had experienced her share of barriers before. But at this moment, she could not hide her astonishment.

As soon as this barrier finished forming, the sizes of the black Mana Spears began to gradually shrink rapidly, all the while she felt the flow of Mana within her body slow down as well.

At this unexpected turn of events, she quickly scanned her surroundings and gritted her teeth.

“What kind of trickery is this?!”

Vampires didn’t bother to answer her, even this time. Instead, from behind their back, a small and dark-reddish rift in the space opened up; from there, dozens of tentacles exploded out. These things slapped away the Mana Spears and flung themselves at Hazeline’s location.

Right in that moment when those grotesque-looking tentacles and their sharp edges were about to cut into her neck...

Five lines of slashes, coming from unexpected 'claws', gleamed coldly in the air as the tentacles were sliced apart, turning to powder before dissipating into the wind.

Only then did the nine Vampires show some signs of being agitated.

"This f\*\*\*ing... *Pant, pant...*" (Hazeline)

Sensing the approach of death for the first time after a long, long while, Hazeline broke out in cold sweat, her breathing ragged and shallow.

"These crazy sons of b\*\*\*hes have gone completely bonkers insane. Resorting to using sh\*tty black magic... huh?"

Hazeline began pointing accusatory fingers at the Vampires while growling like a wounded animal, only to have a strong hand powerfully rein her back in from behind.

"...Miss Hazeline. Please calm down first. We are at a disadvantage here. Do you know of the ways to disable a barrier like this?"

Sae-Jin looked at her with a hardened face. Sensing the overall strengths of the nine suddenly-appearing Vampires via the Wolf's intuition, he couldn't help but feel flustered here. In the Human Form, there was just no way he'd be able to fight against all of them at the same time.

"I've never seen a barrier like this before. It must be from the school of black magic, but... I'm truly sorry. Because of me, even Mister Sae-Jin has..."

Hazeline's misunderstanding hadn't alleviated just yet, and thus she was feeling apologetic towards Sae-Jin as a result. Seeing her like this, some of the tension in him lightened up, causing him to smile weakly and nod his head.

"It's fine. I'll do my best to buy us time, so please, look for a way to..."

Unfortunately for the two, these Vampires weren't polite enough to give them time to formulate a response.

Truly out of the blue, a giant meteorite formed on the skies within the barrier and

began descending down rapidly on Sae-Jin and Hazeline. She summoned forth a barrier of her own with what little Mana she could wield, while he lengthened his claws and slashed out a whirlwind.

That's how they managed to stop the meteorite, but then, an unsighted tentacle shot towards them from the side. This thing easily smashed apart the barrier and inflicted a huge wound on Hazeline's waist.

"Kkeuck!!"

Hazeline stumbled and collapsed on the ground. Sae-Jin spat out a bunch of expletives and tried to cut the isolation barrier with his claws, but as expected, his actions proved to be ineffective.

"I can't do this as a human..."

Sighing out grandly, Sae-Jin extracted one of the Spiritualised potions out from his body and healed Hazeline's wound.

"...Euh euh..."

"Miss Hazeline, are you alright?"

Then, he studied Hazeline's face; she seemed rather relieved as the searing pain lessened a great deal.

"More or less..." (Hazeline)

"Please listen to me carefully. Me, I'm definitely not a Monster Man, nor a Demonic Being. If it's you, Miss Hazeline, you will trust me on this one, right?"

A Monster that could change into a person, the so-called Monster Man.

The being straddling the boundary between a human and a Monster, the Demonic Being.

Of the two, 'Demonic Being' actually was a collective term denoting all the races with violent nature and tendencies who had migrated from another world to planet Earth. These Demonic Beings were different from Vampires and Nagas in that, not one media outlet 'stood up' for them, and thus were now classified as targets to be eliminated on

sight.

If Lycanthropes still existed, then they would surely fall into this category as well.

This was one of the reasons why Sae-Jin hesitated revealing his Trait to the others. After all, Demonic Beings who died while claiming to be humans holding unique Traits numbered quite a few.

“...?? What do you mean by...” (Hazeline)

In the middle of her sentence, Vampires attacked again. Sae-Jin managed to destroy the tentacles with his razor-sharp claws, but against the huge ball of black flames flying towards them, these claws weren't much of a help while he was in the Human Form.

“Kkyaahk!!”

Sae-Jin hurriedly pushed Hazeline with his arm and then flung himself to the opposite side.

*Kwaaahang!!*

The ground they were standing on mere seconds ago was distorted as if lava had melted it down.

“For now, search for a method to break out of this isolation barrier!!” (Sae-Jin)

He never once believed that he'd be able to conceal his Trait forever.

Sae-Jin shouted out at her, and then – assumed the form of the Hero Orc covered in blue scales.

The physique that easily exceeded the height of two metres; with the pair of burning eyes, he glared at the Vampires and grasped the mace tightly.

Within him, his fighting spirit, combined with rage boiled over.

*\*SFX for an Orc's roar\**

That was why he just had to let out the roar containing all his hunger for battle.

Although Hazeline was busy backpedalling in sheer fright, right now he had no interest in her plight whatsoever.

He then rushed forward, slamming away the various tentacles that were coiling out of pretty much everywhere, while completely ignoring those magic spells that were powerful enough to tickle him. The damage inflicted on the Orc's pristine scales were pretty much zero. His overwhelming appearance easily transcended that of a mere Orc, reminding all present of a mythical demonic fiend, instead.

"What the f\*\*\*...?!"

The Vampires finally lost their calmness and began falling into disorder and one even spat out some choice words.

"—-!!!"

With a roar that threatened to destroy the eardrums of all who listened to it, the Orc slammed down with his mace. As soon as the weapon slammed on the surface of the road, the ground gouged out in a crater, and the entire isolation barrier began to quake uncontrollably.

Seven out of the nine Vampires began panicking and started firing all sorts of magic spells to stop the rampaging Orc at all costs. However, the remaining two Vampires continued to maintain their composure. These so-called 'Honorable Apostles' then raised a wall between their group and the Orc, while speaking out words of calm.

"Stop wasting your energy and time. We'll activate the summoning procedure."

<<<<

"...But?!"

When the seven 'Believers' were about to show their astonishment, the mace of the Orc powerfully slammed into the artificial wall with a loud *Thaaahang* and sent out a stupendous shock wave.

"That's probably his so-called 'Trait', no? Well, how unexpected and irritating. Begin the summoning procedure, immediately!"

"But, but, if we summon Lady Bathory here..."

“Mm? You think I’m insane? There’s no need to summon her Majesty here. The Death Knight will be more than enough.”

*Kwaaahang!!*

The mace slammed into the wall once more. Cracks noisily formed on the magically created defensive wall.

“Hurry. There’s not much time.”

Sensing the urgency of the situation, the nine Vampires hurriedly began reciting the chant together. The language they spoke was not Korean, not English, not even Japanese, but that of another world.

Sae-Jin’s intuition immediately told him of the impending crisis, so he activated the Skill ‘Warrior of Reversal’ and attacked the magic wall even harder. Unfortunately, although the crack opened up just a bit wider, the defensive wall stood.

“Step aside for a second, please!!”

It was then, he heard Hazeline’s shout along with the sensation of magic energy from the back. As soon as Sae-Jin stepped aside, very, very thin Mana Spear shot past him. It slipped in through the crack and splendidly set a Vampire’s neck ablaze.

“Kkheurk!!”

At this sudden and successful attack, one of the Vampires met with an untimely death. However, it was still a bit too late. From the ground dyed in the darkest shades of black, the shape of an ebony knight slowly emerged above the surface.

This was a relic of the past, straight from the Vampires’ previous world.

The strongest Undead, created out of a Knight who had passed on a long time ago – the Death Knight.

*\*SFX for sounds of glass (?) shattering\**

As the Death Knight finished emerging, the defensive wall shattered like glass and Sae-Jin swung his mace against the still-immobile Death Knight. Too bad for him, though – those damnable tentacles got in the way of his attack and he had no choice but to

retreat.

“You, find how to destroy, this barrier yet?” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin shouted out. It was quite likely that if he started pounding on it, the barrier could collapse just like before. But there just wasn't enough time for that.

“I'm still looking!”

As Hazeline shouted back, the Death Knight completely awakened. From the gaps of the metal helm that hid its entire head, a pair of eerie red eyes lit up.

As soon as its consciousness returned in full, the Death Knight unsheathed the sword mounted on its hip and slashed out. The deep red sword aura flying out in a crescent trajectory was roughly slapped away by Sae-Jin's mace as he dashed towards the Death Knight.

*Kwaaahahng!!*

The Orc's mace shattered the air as it came down on the Death Knight's head, but it swung its great sword to block the attack. In that instant, a powerful shock wave swept out and raised a huge dust cloud that blocked the view.

*Clang- Clang-*

From within this thick dust cloud, the sounds of metal colliding against one another rang out continuously.

In terms of both the raw strength and skill, the Death Knight was not at disadvantage at all compared to Sae-Jin in the Orc Form. On top of this, the irritating obstruction from the surrounding Vampires were making this battle quite difficult as well.'

It was nearly impossible to defend against both the Death Knight's sword and the magic spells of the Vampires at the same time. So, Sae-Jin tried to focus on this Death Knight and let the other attacks slip by for now, but the damn Undead's swordsmanship was like an impregnable fortress with absolutely no opening whatsoever.

‘... This situation is too unfavourable.’

Sae-Jin gritted his teeth as the sharp nicks began appearing on the tough scales covering his body.

In order to have a smoother battle, it was the correct strategy to kill off all the Wizards in the rear first who were in charge of supporting fire. Unfortunately for him, the current Orc Form was not agile enough to get past the Death Knight.

If he was in the Werewolf Form, it might just be possible, but he was certain that he'd not be able to withstand a single strike while transforming under this kind of intense situation.

“..”

Sae-Jin glanced at the alert window faintly wavering just above the shoulders of the Death Knight. There was still one more method left that could potentially help him overcome this tricky situation.

[Will you evolve into the 'Lycanthrope'? :Yes/No]

That damn alert window sure as hell looked incredibly alluring right about now. He thought that, whether there were pros and cons of becoming Lycanthrope or not, he had to actually survive in order to experience it.

“Any luck...?”

Sae-Jin shouted at Hazeline and glanced at her direction. But she was just as occupied as he was currently. Instead of searching for a way to break the isolation barrier, she was too busy engaging in a life-or-death battle against two Vampires.

“...F\*ck.”

If this unfavourable situation persisted, then both of them would perish here. There wasn't much time to decide anymore, and his reasoning of a Human was quickly deserting him. Seeing those damnable Vampires at the back busy shooting out those evil magic spells, his entire body quaked in violent rage, wishing nothing but to rip all their bodies asunder.

*\*SFX for another loud Orcish roar\**



Sae-Jin roared out loudly and – selected ‘Yes’.

In that moment, countless alert windows popped up. The windows seemed to fill up the entire the world and blocked his view completely. It was a scene he had never experienced before.

# CHAPTER 86

## INTENSIFICATION (3)

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[The Ebony Wolf Form has now changed to: Lycanthrope Form.]

[All Stats rise drastically after the Human Form and the Lycanthrope Form merge.]

[A special Trait of the Lycanthrope, where it grows stronger the longer it is exposed to the moonlight, now applies.]

[When in the appearance of 'Wolf', the blood flow within the body will increase.]

[Proficiency for all existing Skills related to the 'Wolf' will rise up by a single Level.]

[A Passive Status Constraint, the 'Unresolved Knot' has been acquired.]

- After failing to suppress the wild instincts of the Lycanthrope, the host must assume the appearance of the 'Lycan (Wolf)' for (570) minutes every day, determined by the value of the Stat: Energy Manipulation.
- Until the conditions: (?????), are fulfilled, certain abilities of the Lycanthrope will be locked and unavailable.

[A new Passive Skill: 'Moonlight Skin', has been acquired.] [Proficiency Level: F]

- The skin of the Lycanthrope is on a different level compared to an ordinary wolf. Possessing higher resistance towards physical and magical attacks, and able to freely change its property, the host can reflect light in a certain way to hide his body. However, this part of the skill can not be utilised while in a human's appearance.

[A new Active Skill: 'Eyes of the Wild', has been acquired.] [Proficiency Level: F]

- Eyes that can decipher the enemy's weakness. But now, with the eyes of the

Lycanthrope, the Skill can cause effects of a 'curse', which can reveal the previously-undetected weakness of the enemy by spending Mana. However, in the appearance of the human, the Skill Level will be lowered by one.]

[A new Active Skill: 'Expansion', has been acquired.] [Proficiency Level: F]

– The host can increase the overall size of the wolf's appearance, depending on the Skill Level.

[A new Active Skill: 'Claw Chain', has been acquired.] [Proficiency Level: F]

– Strikes from the host's claws will change directions according to the his will and kill the target. However, in the appearance of the human, the Skill Level will be lowered by one.

[A new Passive Skill:...]

Sae-Jin's view was completely filled up with all these letters. There wasn't enough time to read every single one of them, but since he was sure of his strength increasing, he rapidly changed into the Lycanthrope.

Almost in an instant, silver fur began sprouting out of his body; the Orc had vanished and in its place, a humanoid wolf stood there instead.

Possessing fur and skin that seemed to have absorbed the pure moonlight, the Lycanthrope.

A being that should not have existed in this world – an extinct creature of legends and myths.

At this sudden entrance of a Lycanthrope, all the Vampires fell into a state of panic.

"...??"

Even the Death Knight paused its actions briefly at this sudden turn of events. Its action came from the Undead possessing some consciousness, but that proved to be its biggest mistake. The 'Wolf' took this opening and kicked the ground, heading

directly towards the Vampires.

It raised a tremendous sonic boom in its wake, which even forced the Death Knight to stumble on its feet. Arriving before the group of Vampires in a flash, the 'Wolf' swung its lengthy claw. The five arcs of horrifying slashes drawing in the air descended down and ripped a Vampire's chest wide open – and then, they snaked around before cutting down the second, and the third Vampire down.

And so, when the fourth Vampire got ruthlessly cut down-

The Death Knight quickly arrived, collided with claws of the 'Wolf' and blocked his advance.

Unfortunately for the Undead, the 'Wolf' found its sword swings incredibly slow.

He tilted his body slightly to the side to avoid the sword slash, and resumed moving towards another Vampire. The bastard tried to hurriedly erect a magic shield of some sort, but under the barrage of claws, such magic was simply too inadequate.

*\*SFX for blood raining down\**

The terrifying claws of the 'Wolf' easily passed through the shield and left a fatal wound on the Vampire's chest.

“...”

And the bastard dropped dead, unable to even make a single cry.

All of this happened within the span of five seconds. The Lycanthrope had reaped the lives of five Vampires in the blink of an eye while not even leaving behind an afterimage.

The remaining Vampires got deeply frightened by the sight of the Lycanthrope, their race's sworn enemy which they had never seen before until now, and tried to escape. Too bad, the isolation barrier they had set up earlier came back to bite them in the rear.

“Sir!! P, please, undo the barrier!!”

It was the moment when these Vampire bastards grandly fell into a trap they

themselves had meticulously set up.

“Kkheuaaark!!!”

At the same time, a deep scarlet-coloured flame erupted from the side of the isolation barrier, accompanied by a pitiful scream.

Hazeline seized the opening created when the strength of the barrier weakened due to the deaths of the Vampires, and launched a spell, ‘Hellfire’, which resulted in the death of yet another bloodsucker.

“This damnable...!!”

In the end, the Apostle deactivated the barrier and tried to run.

Of course, Sae-Jin the Lycanthrope would not accept that.

*Kwajeek!!*

The moonlight-coloured wolf easily avoided the sword swings of the Death Knight with some deft evasive manoeuvres, approached next to the Apostle, and then, thrust his fangs towards the neck of the Vampire.

“...Sh\*t!!”

The Apostle didn’t lose his composure even while being under the attack of the wolf and fired off a beam of lightning towards Sae-Jin’s opened maw, but the wolf lightly twisted his body. Instead of hitting the wide open mouth, the beam hit the shoulder – however, the Wolf’s ‘Moonlight Skin’ could negate such a pitiful attack performed in a hurry with ease.

Ignoring the ineffective attack, the ‘Wolf’ successfully ripped the Apostle’s neck to shreds. With his neck bone twisted around unnaturally, the Apostle died in that instant, his body going limp.

The isolation barrier completely broke apart as soon as one of the two Apostles supporting it was killed off.

All that now remained were two Vampires and a Death Knight.

The ‘Wolf’ glanced at the remaining Vampires with its crimson eyes and licked its lips.

“T, this crazy, f\*\*\*ing thing...”

They tried to invoke the Vampire’s trademark reverse summoning magic to escape from this place.

However, the Lycanthrope’s claws could not only render any magic ineffective, those could also cut away the flow of Mana as well.

The ‘Wolf’ slashed out towards the vivid strands of deep red Mana with his claws. In a blink of an eye, the Mana that was about to spirit away the remaining Vampires dissipated, and Hazeline fired off a huge Mana Spear towards the panicking bloodsucker.

The Apostle managed to slap away the Spear using one of those tentacles, but...

“...Oh. Sh\*t.”

...But, the brightly-burning Spear had divided into dozens, hundreds and covered up the entire night sky.

Following the Apostle’s will, the Death Knight quickly change its target towards Hazeline, but it was blocked by Sae-Jin in his ‘Wolf’ form.

And then – hundreds of Mana Spears pierced into the remaining three enemies.

*Ttukwahng!!!*

A destructive explosion rang out.

A Wizard highly proficient in casting magic can accurately assign the target that would bear all of the damage from the spell. That was how, Hazeline could turn the two Vampires to ash without damaging the road or the surroundings.

The last one remaining was the Death Knight.

*Clang—!!*

When the Death Knight’s sword and Sae-Jin’s claws clashed, a cold metallic sound

resounded out alongside bright sparks that flew into the air.

“...Oh my. What is this? You’re still alive? Mister Sae-Jin, please take of that knight for me.” (Hazeline)

Hazeline was about to help Sae-Jin out, before she changed the direction of her gaze towards the Apostle who somehow managed to hold onto his life. It seemed that he had deployed a magic barrier or shield to its absolute maximum and was able to withstand the frightening explosion of Mana Spears, even if it was only by a little bit.

Staring back at the bloodied and mortally injured Apostle who was looking at her with hate-filled eyes, Hazeline began forming a chilling smile. It was as if she had found a nice little toy for herself.

“...Got it.” (Sae-Jin)

After making a simple reply, Sae-Jin activated the new Skill, ‘Eyes of the Wild’ and glared at the Death Knight. Then, the whole world seemed to slow down to a crawl; the view became black and white, except for the small area near the right chest of the Death Knight which was dyed in red. He knew instinctively – that was this Undead’s weak point.

*Kwaaaahang!!*

The Death Knight slashed down with its great sword. As soon as Sae-Jin took a few steps back to evade it, the place he was standing on just now became destroyed and sunk to the ground by that powerful attack.

‘Looks like he was a pretty famous Knight back when... ’ (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin licked his lips. This Undead was proving to be a formidable foe. Even if he had located its weak spot, this thing’s swordsmanship left no gap to exploit.

[Your Proficiency Level is too low!!]

And even though he tried to enlarge the weak spot, as his Skill Level was just too low, he could not affect the body of the Death Knight at all.

‘If that’s the case... ’

He shifted his focus to the great sword swung towards his way. The weapon reflected within the Eyes of the Wild showed no weakness and was jet-black throughout.

However, at the very spot his eyes were focused on, right in the middle of the blade itself, a reddish blot began to form there.

With a wicked smile on his lips, Sae-Jin dodged the swinging sword and then, attacked the middle of the weapon with his claws.

*\*SFX for something splitting apart\**

As per his expectations, a crack developed on the blade. The Death Knight stumbled back in confusion.

But the ‘Wolf’ knew no mercy.

He stepped forward explosively, and slashed out at the Death Knight’s sword once more.

<<<<

And so, it turned out that, without the sword, this Undead Knight was nothing more than a pretty mediocre fist fighter.



“...Mister Sae-Jin?”

After the battle had ended.

Hazeline cautiously called out to Sae-Jin who was busy rummaging through the dead bodies to procure the loot (?). But instead of a human’s face, a Wolf stared back at her. Under the clear moonlight, his fur was shining but his breath was somewhat ragged and heavy.

“Are you surprised?”

The ‘Wolf’ quietly asked. Hazeline lightly shook her head and slowly approached him.



And then...

“.....What are you doing?” (Sae-Jin)

...She began tickling him around his neck area as one would a young puppy.

“Oh. Well, uh, your fur looked so beautiful, so... Wow, but why is your fur so shiny and smooth? It’s like touching silk...”

Hazeline was definitely not shocked or frightened by his appearance. Feeling relieved by this development, Sae-Jin stared at the Elf woman who was deeply absorbed in stroking his fur, before his eyes slowly closed shut. And...

“Huh? H, hey!! Eu-ark!”

He then fell on top of Hazeline, totally unconscious.

That was the aftereffect of using ‘Warrior of Reversal’ three times – twice as the Orc, and once as the Lycanthrope.



Kim Sae-Jin opened his eyes. His eyesight was incomparably clear and the world was filled with vibrant colours. He figured that his Eyes of the Wolf was active currently. Although he wanted to stay still like this, there was this ticklish sensation coming from his side.

So, when he turned his neck to see why, he caught the sight of Hazeline, her lips tightly shut and protruding slightly, still unnecessarily absorbed in brushing his fur.

“ ... ”

Dumbfounded, Sae-Jin stared at her for a while. Even then, she repeated the cycle of brushing his fur, toyed around with it, and grabbing a handful of it – until finally, she realised he was looking at her.

“Heh...” (Hazeline)

Avoiding meeting his gaze out of embarrassment, she scratched the back of her neck.

“What are you doing?” (Sae-Jin)

“...Weeeell, your fur is so smooth and supple and soft, so... it feels really nice to the touch, you know? It improves my mood so much when I’m touching it. It’s kinda like... popping a bubble wrap?”

“.....” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin narrowed his eyes and lightly flung his tail to slap her cheek. It was nothing much, but unfortunately, it seemed that in his current ‘Wolf’ form, the attack power was twice as strong than normal.

“Kkyahk!!” (Hazeline)

After that was dealt with, Sae-Jin reverted back to his human appearance and searched for a mirror. This place was quite foreign to him, though. Was it Hazeline’s home, he wondered.

“Fuu-woo...”

Finding a full-length mirror, Sae-Jin stood at a weird angle next to it and began breathing in deeply. He muttered out, “Please, please, please...”

“It’s the same. You haven’t changed.” (Hazeline)

From his back, he heard Hazeline’s spoiler. He got surprised by that revelation and turned to look at her, before taking a proper good look at himself as reflected by the mirror.

Thankfully, there hadn’t been any noticeable changes, if he disregarded the profile of his nose which had risen up a bit.

“Whew... What a relief.”

Sae-Jin smiled thickly, and lightly slapped both of his cheeks.

“I guess people might wonder if I had some work done on my face or something.” (Sae-Jin)

As he began to speak in jest, Hazeline walked and stood next to him.

The reflection of her showed just how incredibly beautiful she was. He just could not find any blemishes on her facial features whatsoever, even with the much-improved eyesight of the Lycanthrope.

“Heheh. I think so too. After all, you have become even more handsome than before.”  
(Hazeline)

With her eyes arching into crescent moon shape, she studied Sae-Jin’s reflection in the mirror. And then, she began lightly stroking his shoulders and whispered softly.

“...I’m really, really thankful for your help yesterday. Without Mister Sae-Jin there, I’d probably have died then.”

It was a simple, and somewhat short words of gratitude from her. However, his heart beat harder the moment he sensed how sincere she was from those words.

“...Miss Hazeline, you’re taller than I thought.”

That’s why he quickly changed the topic.

Hazeline always wore a lengthy robe that covered pretty much everything from the top of her head right down to her heels, so seeing her in regular casual wear, he couldn’t help but appreciate her perfectly balanced figure.

“...Well, Elves are... we’re mostly like that. The average height of female Elves are around 170, so I’m just slightly taller than the rest, is all.”

Hazeline blushed slightly and retreated away from Sae-Jin.

“If that is all, I shall be heading off to work now. Oh, and I’ll keep Mister Sae-Jin’s Trait as a secret between us, so you don’t have to worry.”

“Thank you very much.”

She picked up the large robe discarded on the couch and put it on, then left her home looking exactly like as he’d known her until now. But before she left...

“Ah, right. Mister Sae-Jin, I’m really sorry. Because of me, you had to go through that ordeal... To think those Mafiosi would resort to learning black magic...”

However, it seemed that her misunderstanding had not been resolved yet until now.

## CHAPTER 87

### TRUTH? (1)

---

The changes in Sae-Jin's life after evolving into the Lycanthrope was quite varied. Firstly, his outward appearance hadn't changed all that much, but the physical abilities had gone through a massive change. Although, having said that, maybe he had become too famous or something – when he made his first public appearance there were quiet rumours of him having some work done on his face whispered around.

As an example, he didn't have to assume the form of a 'Wolf' in order to twist metal with his bare hands, not to mention he could also cut away Mana of the Knights as well.

And thanks to many new Passives he acquired, both the Orc and the Goblin Forms also enjoyed increase in power along with his human form. Notably, the synergy between the Goblin Form and the Passive Skills of the Lycanthrope were so good, it led Sae-Jin to think seriously about leveling up his Goblin Form in earnest.

However, not every change could be classified simply as a positive one.

It was during training; he got scared all of a sudden, watching Yi Hye-Rin panic after he 'destroyed' Mana with the literal single fist strike. He was scared, wondering whether he would be able to suppress the instincts of the Lycanthrope which were as strong as that power he had just demonstrated unwittingly.

But it seemed that Sae-Jin's personality had changed subtly as well without him being able to notice it, and things like his worries were quickly forgotten.

"Thank you for your hard work today."

He began massaging Yi Hye-Rin's shoulders as she sat on the training facility floor, her breath shallow and heavy. It was the first time she came in physical contact – AKA skinship – with Sae-Jin, but since she did not sense any ulterior motive behind his actions, not to mention it felt refreshing as well, Yi Hye-Rin didn't offer any resistance.

"Oh. Yes, my... pleasure..."

Although she replied this way, Hye-Rin could definitely sense a chilly glare being shot towards her. She didn't have to check to figure out who was behind it.

"Well then, Miss Hye-Rin. I'll be leaving first. Take care during the remainder of your training, and please give the recruitment process for the new Society members your consideration." (Sae-Jin)

Kim Sae-Jin had made a request to all the current Society members. Separate from the soon-to-be launched second open recruitment, he told them to select people who might serve as their own 'direct subordinates' within the Society.

"Yes, sir. I'm looking real hard right now~."

Yi Hye-Rin replied enthusiastically. Actually, there were already one or two people busy trying to kiss her a\*s, after somehow hearing about this whole thing. Heck, there were a few Knights with pretty good backgrounds asking her outright if she'd like any new piece of equipment, even...

Since Yi Hye-Rin focused more on a person's nature more than anything else, such behaviours made her feel just a bit bitter inside. But still, she accepted it as the result of her Society's prestige rising up so high.

"Ah, right. By the way, Guild Master, didn't you make a schedule for my Tattoo a couple of weeks ago~?"

She then suddenly recalled it. The special treatment only the members of The Monster received, the Magic Tattoos – the thing that made pretty much every other Knights and Wizards go crazy with envy and jealousy; the thing that some folks criticised as being a cheat that didn't even require proper hard work from its recipients.

Finally, it was Yi Hye-Rin's turn after others had their fun already.

"Surely, you didn't forget, did you~?"

To get a rise out of Yu Sae-Jung, Yi Hye-Rin deliberately approached Sae-Jin with flirty steps and began 'lightly' touching him here and there. She could hear a person gritting her teeth from somewhere, but Hye-Rin also 'lightly' ignored that.

"Of course. I didn't forget. Please come find me on next week Saturday."

Sae-Jin smiled and replied, then stepped outside the training facility. Not too long after that, Yu Sae-Jung hoofed it towards Hye-Rin in an angry, stomping gait.

“...Unni, are you openly declaring war?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Yu Sae-Jung narrowed her eyes and glared, but...

“Mm? Dunno what you mean~?”

...Yi Hye-Rin simply replied back with an easy-going smile.



*– Since we have snagged such an important guest for today, I’ve got this feeling that our ratings will go right through the roof.*

A current affairs show could be seen on TV. Its ‘format’ was quite simple in execution, so much so that there were only a few chairs present with a black background in the studio. The emcee and the guest would simply chat away on the current hot button topics.

But it would be unwise to dismiss this show because of its simplicity – since it was known as the best of its kind in the Republic of Korea, after all.

*– The number one Society people wish to join! The number one Society employees wish to work for! On top of this, entering the world of business proper with the establishment of the corporation, ‘TM’ – please welcome the Society Chairman of The Monster, Mister Kim Sae-Jin.*

When the emcee finished his intro, Sae-Jin inside the TV screen bowed his head towards the camera.

*– How do you do. Name’s Kim Sae-Jin.*

*– I gotta say, I’m greatly intrigued. Didn’t you refuse making an appearance on pretty much every single show out there? Why did you agree so easily to come on this one?*

The emcee’s voice was seemingly filled to the brim with pride.

*– Well, that is... The reason’s simple, actually. I’ve been a fan of this show for a while now,*

*and it seems that our Society has been in the media's spotlight quite often lately. So, I've decided to come here and scratch that itch of curiosity in the audience at home. Also, this was the most important part... it turns out that your show has the shortest recording time compared to others.* (Kim Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin's actual reason for this appearance was his own curiosity. After evolving into the Lycanthrope, Sae-Jin had lost quite a bit of inhibition in his personality. And now, having a lot of leeway with his 'time', he was getting rather interested in appearing on a TV show. It just happened so that this one called him up first before anybody else.

*– Haha. You have quite a good sense of humour, sir~. It's true that we don't take up a lot of time to record, though.*

The show started with laughter, and gradually, they moved on to other subjects. First, they talked about his family background. Secondly, the reason why he founded The Monster as well as its explosive growth of late. Thirdly, the allure (?) of plastic surgery. And finally, even the thing many viewers were no doubt curious about – the 'treasure' crafted by the Orc Blacksmith.

Kim Sae-Jin seen on the TV screen showed not one moment of nervousness and smoothly carried on with the conversation. It was the moment the Skills 'Eloquence' and 'Pleasant Voice' showed off their true worth.

To think of himself in that manner was just a bit... But the truth was, the combination of his nice voice, excellent eloquence and the handsome face as seen on the TV screen made him come across as a gentle and wonderful man.

As if to reinforce that notion, the show's ratings had increased by two and a half times. The reactions of the viewers were also very positive as well. And after making that one appearance, his social media followers had increased by another two hundred thousand.

If it was by this much, then, wasn't this the proof of everyone thinking along the same thing as him and not the case of simple narcissism?

"Guild Master, the auction will begin in three hours."

And so, as Sae-Jin was deeply submerged in narcissism that wasn't, Jo Hahn-Sung opened the door and entered the waiting room. He had combed his hair up to look neat and tidy for the occasion, but as if to show how nervous he was, his fingers were



trembling noticeably.

“What’s the current situation like?” (Sae-Jin)

“Haha. It’s no joke out there, sir. Maybe it’s the first auctioning of a Treasure grade item in ages that’s to blame, but regardless, I heard that there are ten helicopters flying above the Hyunwol Auction House as we speak. There were apparently more, but it seems that, due to safety concerns, they had to be grounded.”

Jo Hahn-Sung changed the channel on the TV, saying that Sae-Jin should see for himself. Right now, it was Saturday evening – according to regular schedule, entertainment programmes should be on the public broadcasting channels, but almost all of them were covering the auction being held at the Hyunwol.

*– At 8 o’clock this evening, the auctioning process for the heaven shaking work crafted by the Orc Blacksmith will finally take place. The weapon that was unanimously judged as the genuine Treasure grade by 10 judges from both the local and international Blacksmith Associations, is now named as...*

The Hyunwol Auction House as seen within the TV screen looked really busy. There were seemingly tens of thousands of regular people gathering around the vicinity of the Sebit island where the auction house was located on; and the professional bodyguards were working tirelessly as the stream of high-value individuals continued to enter the auction venue unabated.

*– Indeed! We can even see that the Britain’s top ranked Knight, Arthur Fontere has come as well. Previously, Mister Fontere had strongly expressed his determination to procure this Treasure on his social media posts as well as on interviews with various Korean media outlets. It’s a well known fact that he has sent numerous video messages to both the Chairman Kim Sae-Jin and the Orc Blacksmi... Oh! Oh! Over there! We just spotted the Prime Minister of Japan, Mister Naraka, entering the auction venue!!*

The cameras filmed the Japanese Prime Minister entering the auction venue in a hurry as if someone was busy chasing him down or something.

Kim Sae-Jin let out a hollow chuckle. That guy had shown up in the end, after all that yapping on and on about some national pride and whether he was coming or not.

“I hear that the Japanese Prime Minister is personally accompanied by 20 odd Knights as well. And they are all supposedly Highest Tiers to boot. I think the Japanese and

their strong desire to acquire the merchandise is now on the national level.”

No matter how valuable an equipment was, if there was no one capable of using it, it would be a waste of everyone’s time. Also, if a Knight didn’t become its new owner, there was a real danger of the sword becoming the part of the so-called “future investment portfolio” and rot away in some dimly-lit vault somewhere.

That was why Sae-Jin placed a condition for purchase. The only ones eligible to buy the weapon were Knights – and even among them, those without ability would be eliminated from the process through the Orc’s evaluation.

“Really?” (Sae-Jin)

“Yes, sir. But besides that... You should be getting ready, sir.”

Jo Hahn-Sung fiddled around the edges of his tie once more before taking in a deep breath. However, Kim Sae-Jin simply waited, while his gaze alternated between his phone and Hahn-Sung.

And after about three minutes went by like that...

*\*SFX for a mobile phone vibrating\**

His mobile began buzzing.

“Oh. Well, I, uh... will have to show up a bit later. I mean, our merchandise is the finale of the auction, anyway.” (Sae-Jin)

Leaving behind the panicking Jo Hahn-Sung, Sae-Jin hurriedly moved his feet.

The call was from Yu Baek-Song.

The very best timing for sharing of sensitive information was right now, when almost all the agents of the SID were assigned as the guards of the auction venue.



<<<<

“ ”  
...

Feeling dumbfounded, Kim Sae-Jin's eyes narrowed to a slit.

– *“That is absolutely the everything I could uncover. Any more than that, well...”* (Yu Baek-Song)

Yu Baek-Song pointed at the manila envelope with a slightly uneasy expression. But that wasn't the reason why Sae-Jin was feeling miffed at the moment.

“Hey, what the hell? Do I look like a criminal to you?!”

Although they were in Yu Baek-Song's house, there was a thick plate glass standing between him and her, the kind one might find in a visiting room inside a prison. No, that was not strictly accurate, as there were air holes in those glasses in the visiting room. This place was sealed up so tight, they were actually conversing through their mobile phones.

– *“Can't be helped. Your scent robs me of my judgement, after all.”*

“...Fuu.”

– *“In any case, check out the documents first.”*

Sae-Jin was deeply dissatisfied by this arrangement, but regardless, he still picked up the envelope.

– *“The contents are the results of secret autopsy procedures performed by us, the National Police Agency. I even went through the last available records to make sure, but that's all there is.”*

He slowly absorbed the contents of the documents. There wasn't a lot of information to go through – only three pages' worth. But he did his best not to miss one single letter.

And the information contained within was shocking to him, to say the least.

[Kim Jae-Hyuk. Savagely murdered by Vampire(s) while returning home after completing his duties, his corpse ripped apart. The case is now classified as a homicide with grudge suspected of being the motive after the blood of the victim was found largely untouched within the body. —The rest of the information has

been erased—] [Analysis of Kim Jae-Hyuk's blood content reveals that only 88% of it is human-based; one of his ancestors is suspected to be non-human.]

[Jin Soh-Jung. Requested for witness protection programme from the SID. Her whereabouts were leaked, resulting in her rape & murder by Vampire(s). Eyewitness testimony indicates the victim was seen talking to an unknown male for a considerable length of time. The contents of the conversation is suspected to be in relation to her son.] [After the recovery of the influential House of Bathory's symbol at the crime scene, the prime suspect is now seen as a Vampire from the Bathory family.] [... All information deleted...]

'Something' was trying to force its way out of his throat and he couldn't even swallow down his saliva.

– *"... I'm sure there is much to take in. The result of the autopsy shows that, although he was a bit peculiar, your father was a human. After all, it's a bit of a stretch to call an '88%' as a halfling or a quarterling, right? And since your mother was definitely human, you don't have worry about what you are – you're also human."*

Yu Baek-Song carefully continued. However, not one word could enter Sae-Jin's ears.

He rummaged through the documents for a very long time, his hands trembling uncontrollably – then he stopped. His breathing ragged and heavy, Sae-Jin stared at Yu Baek-Song. His eyes were full of confusion and rage.

"Is there no other way to find out what got deleted? Those should be the most important information of them all."

– *"Yeah, well, it's impossible right now. That is the limit of my current position, after all."*

"...Your position, you say?"

– *"Yeah. I told you. I have other people above me..."*

"In that case..."

Kim Sae-Jin clenched his fist tightly. He was already well aware of his parents being murdered. But he simply had no idea how incredibly bad and agonising their final

moments were.

He just could not rein in this tsunami-like waves of rage boiling in his heart. So much so, even he was beginning to think that such an anger was unusual for him. There probably was a side effect from evolving into the Lycanthrope at play here, but right now, Sae-Jin was not in the correct frame of mind to question his current state at all.

– *“H, hey, wait a second!! What are you trying to do? Sto...”*

He slammed the glass with his fist.

*Kwaaahang!!*

The ultra-tough reinforced glass shattered into pieces, and Yu Baek-Song looked at the result with her eyes completely round. She was wondering just how the heck the glass reinforced with magic could be breached this easily...

“In that case, all we have to do is to move Miss Yu Baek-Song up the career ladder, no?”

Sae-Jin ripped the bothersome glass completely off, and then grasped the scruff of hurriedly-fleeing Yu Baek-Song’s neck.

“Euck! Tha, that isn’t a simple thing at all!! But besides that, lemme go, right now!! I can send you straight to jail if I want to, you kno...”

“For now, please be quiet.”

The only thing filling up Sae-Jin’s head, now that he had lost much of his reasoning, was purest form of rage.

“It is simple. I’ll support you. I’ve accumulated enough power and influence for that.”

His voice was trembling as the words flowed out.

“No matter who sits above you, push him away and take that position. Then, everything shall be resolved that way.”

“...”

While gently stroking her hair, the corners of his lips were lifting up in a fake smile.

His brown eyes were gleaming coldly, enough to give a person goosebumps.

Yu Baek-Song gave up looking into those eyes. Her body was shaking all on by itself. It was the first time this White Tiger had felt like this – the sensation of being a prey standing before a true predator.

# CHAPTER 88

## TRUTH? (2)

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Within the VVIP hall of the Hyunwol Auction House, hundreds of important figures had gathered. They were the kind of people that held prominent positions in their chosen field of profession.

Nominally, only the Knights could potentially purchase the Treasure grade weapon, but there were quite a few people participating as a representative of other Knights in order to build personal connections as well as to broaden their horizons.

That was probably why there was such a diverse melting pot of people that ignored race, nationality, and species within the auction venue, where Knights, big shots from the world of politics and commerce as well as mega celebrities the likes of which South Koreans had never experienced before were busy rubbing shoulders currently.

But all these men and women of great fame were looking for one man's whereabouts in particular.

And that person was Kim Sae-Jin.

"...Why isn't he coming?"

As the auction went under way, a worried Yu Sae-Jung repeatedly looked around while asking Jo Hahn-Sung. For some strange reason, she seemed to be shrinking away like a loser which was quite unlike her usual proud and confident self.

"Even I'm not... Well, he did say he'll come before the finale, but he also mentioned not to wait for him."

"...Fuu."

Sae-Jung let out a sigh. However, it was closer to a relieved sigh rather than a worried one.

In all honesty, she was feeling quite worried.

Currently, there were just way too many Elves and Fox-type Soo-ins who were famous the world over for their blinding, transcendent beauty everywhere she looked within this venue. And they were the reason why Yu Sae-Jung had lost all of her usual confidence.

She felt that, compared to those women, she seemed to be lacking in so many areas. Why did her face have to be so angular, and why were her legs so short? For the first time in her life, she began to feel resentment towards her dad.

“He’s coming for sure, you’ll see. Don’t you worry.” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

Joo Ji-Hyuk, still clueless, tried to comfort her unnecessarily. Sae-Jung nodded her head lightly, pulled out her phone and then began typing a text message. The recipient was ‘Sae-Jin Oppa~’. Only his name had the honour of having an emoticon next to it, among hundreds saved in her list of contacts.

[Oppa, we will take very good care of the auction, so if there’s something urgent going on, you don’t have force yourself to come.]

And just as she hit ‘send’...

“Finally! We shall commence with the last lot of the auction, the one all you’ve been looking forward to!”

As the emcee’s loud voice settled down heavily on the auction venue, the Orc Blacksmith’s masterpiece revealed itself to the world.

The ‘treasure’, wrapped tightly in a thick veil, was moved to the centre of the hall. The collective sounds of people swallowing their saliva echoed around the venue.

“The one that will go down in the annals of history. I present to you, the true treasure crafted by the brilliant Orc Blacksmith, the sword ‘Gram.’” *(TL: just in case some of you readers are not familiar with Norse mythology, Gram is the name of the sword wielded by Sigurd to slay the dragon, Fafnir. Google is your friend. Yes.)*

A chaos broke out in the auction hall when it was revealed that the Blacksmith dared to pilfer the name of the legendary artifact for his own creation.



“According to the Blacksmith himself, he tried his very best to replicate the Gram of the legends as exactly as possible.”

The moment emcee pulled the veil off the sword, all that doubt and dissatisfaction morphed into admiration and amazement.

Some Knights couldn't sit still anymore and shot up from their seats, even.

The lengthy, pure-white mithril blade; the hilt shining with an exquisite golden hue; the sword that boasted a smooth and neat appearance, the Gram reflected the lights from the venue to a blinding level.

The now-trademark symbol of the Orc Blacksmith – the intricate carvings – was absent on its exterior, making it look a bit plain, but all the Knights gathered here instinctively knew. That truly was one of the greatest ‘treasures’ the world have seen yet.

“And so, the auction will commence from now on. The starting bidding amount will be set at \$4.5 million USD. The minimum increase will be \$100 thousand USD...”

Just as the emcee announced this...

Suddenly, the entrance to the auction hall opened.

And the man who showed up from the opened gap was, without a doubt, the protagonist of this auction – Kim Sae-Jin himself.

Looking bashful for his interruption, he quickly moved his feet and went towards his assigned seat.

Of course, people wouldn't let him go by just like that. Every single one of them tried their best to engage Sae-Jin in a conversation, and so, the start of the auction had to be delayed for another 20 minutes.



The auction for the final item lasted for over two hours.

The final hammer price was... \$165 million USD. No matter how steep the competition for it was, it truly was a ridiculous amount.

And the lucky bidder was...

[The Raven Knights Order, succeeds in finally bidding for the sword with \$165 million...] [The uncomfortable backstory; the Korean government decides to support the Raven Order. Is the Dawn Order being suppressed?] [The sword 'Gram'; the man who reenacted the legend, the Orc Blacksmith is already one of the greats.]

It was the Raven Knights Order – in other words, the Republic of Korea.

Considering that it was a Treasure grade item, the final bid price was slightly on the low side, but this result was somewhat within expectations.

If an overseas entity were to snap up this sword, then the real amount they would have to pay at the end of it all, would be 4~5 times the bidding price, thanks to special tariffs applicable to luxury goods, special tax ascribed from the 'special' law, value added tax, etc, etc... Not to forget, one had to also consider policies of the Hyunwol Auction House, the ones about having to 'pay the entire amount in cash' and keeping to a strict 'payment time schedule'.

All those representatives of nations and Knights Orders hoping against hoping had to return home satisfied in the knowledge that they were able to personally witness a Treasure-grade sword with their own eyes.

Many international media expressed their dissatisfaction and regret at the Korean government openly supporting one of their own – the criticism was especially harsh from the Japanese, as they were the ones who had bidden till the bitter end.

However, even then, what dominated the international headlines was not dissatisfaction, but the beautiful exterior of the Treasure-graded sword, Gram.

That pure-white blade and that perfectly manufactured hilt. And contained within that relatively simple appearance, the power matching up to its legendary namesake.

After making the hearts of every Knight flutter with nothing but its name and a single photo, Gram easily took the position of 30th out of 100 best weapons in existence as voted by the 'Time' magazine. And the Orc Blacksmith was admitted to the ranks of the world's greatest blacksmiths.

And then, the Raven Knights Order decided to award the sword Gram to its current Order Master, Kim Hyun-Seok as a loan lasting for the period of 10 years. The ceremony was broadcast live and caused quite a stir among the populace.

In the end, it was a sort-of victory for both the Korean government as they didn't let their treasure taken away, and for the Orc Blacksmith with his fame now spreading to the rest of the world.

However, now that the Orc Blacksmith had suddenly become a hot topic of conversation, a strange and 'nonsensical' rumour about his real identity also began circulating around, one where it was alleged that Kim Sae-Jin was actually the Orc all along.

While the entirety of the Korean peninsula was still rumbling on from the excitement of the auction, Kim Sae-Jin had to answer an emergency summons from the Monster Mercenary Company before he could come down from all that euphoria.

"We've finally come across the information on the hotel where the Vampires I've mentioned before are staying currently." (Kim Yu-Sohn)

With 130 intelligence operatives and 50 field agents AKA Mercenaries, Sae-Jin's Company now boasted a better information gathering network than most underground organizations. On the amount of secrets he knew alone, he had already surpassed most media outlets by now.

"The hotel is called 'Romance of Dawn'. Not only were the strange happenings occurring on the building's top floors clearly been observed, the angry voices of a woman and traces of magic being used were recorded in the security systems installed on the corridors." (Kim Yu-Sohn)

"...Then, just who exactly is staying there?"

"We suspect it to be a 'Bathory'."

In that instant, killing intent flickered in Sae-Jin's eyes, his fists clenching tightly.

Even if it was sudden, the name 'Bathory' was already deeply ingrained in his psyche. The cops did find a symbol of Bathory at the crime scene of his mother's death, after all.

Finally, he had found the place these bastards were hiding in. So, this could be unexpectedly easy for...

“No, sir. Bathory’s powers are far too great for us to do anything at the moment. The rumours speak of the Bathory family head possessing enough power to level a mountain with a flick of a hand and dye the sky jet black. That means, even without all that exaggeration, this prey is an incredibly powerful foe.” (Kim Yu-Sohn)

However, Kim Yu-Sohn put an end to Sae-Jin’s thought process.

“I have fought against countless Vampires, so I can confidently say this much – the hidden strength accumulated through the passing of Vampiric bloodlines is simply beyond our scope of imagination.” (Kim Yu-Sohn)

What Kim Yu-Sohn was saying, was that they should be satisfied with just knowing where the Vampires were and wait for the right opportunity.

“...Is the bastard really that strong?”

“Yes. It’s possible that the family head alone could equal a single Knights Order. After all, these are the creatures that have sacrificed their own race’s leader in pursuit of power.”

Kim Sae-Jin could only nod his head as this was a considered opinion from a veteran who had fought against Vampires for over half of his life.

“...Fuu. Then, let’s just head to the basement for now. Oh, right. Did you make sure to secure all the access points?”

“Of course, sir. Let us hurry. The ‘kids’ have grown so much lately.”



<<<<

Sae-Jin was currently in his Goblin Form.

However, his current location was a bit unusual.

It was not the usual Monster field, but the basement located below the grounds of the

## Society, The Monster.

Around three weeks ago, Sae-Jin ordered Kim Yu-Sohn to open up a space in the basement.

Of course, since the purpose of this space was not something that could be explained to the public, even the members of his Society had to be kept in the dark as well.

There was a variety of uses for this basement area, but the most prominent one was the ‘village of Goblins’.

As of now, Monsters known as Goblins were facing extinction in Korea. The only reason why such weak Monsters were able to survive in the first place was because they had formed large packs; but then, the distortion of the earth’s crust happened and these creatures ended up getting separated from one another.

And so, Sae-Jin began taking in those Goblins that had nowhere left to go, and just like his actions as the Hero Orc, he decided to take care of these critters as well. Besides, quite unlike those Orcs who were only good for fighting, Goblins had much more value to offer overall.

Well, the old saying ‘Goblins are craftier than humans’ didn’t come out of nothing, after all.

First of all, if these Monsters took care of crafting potions, then he’d not have to waste his precious time on doing that anymore, and as far as their Witchcraft was concerned, the potential application for them was just too numerous to count.

...That was, as long as they leveled up properly, of course.

“Nice. They are quite obedient, aren’t they?”

These creatures were pretty quick on the uptake. They were hard workers and were easy to educate as well. Well, he did threaten them a bit while in the Lycanthrope form so there was that but still, they displayed unexpected amount of loyalty and honesty.

“Keep on making those potions as I showed you, got it? And Witchcraft Goblins continue on with your research.”

Kim Sae-Jin shouted out at the Goblins. They replied back with their own shouts of

*Kkyahahk-!*

“Is it because of the good ‘welfare benefits’? They unexpectedly work so hard,” said Kim Yu-Sohn, with a smile on his face.

Although it was weird to say ‘welfare benefits’ for Monsters, it was actually happening right here. The Goblins living in this place were blessed with humane living quarters, and received clean food and drinking water three times a day. The food was leftovers from the Society’s cafeteria, though.

“Well, besides that – how goes the gathering of information so far?”

Changing back to the appearance of a human before anyone had noticed it, Sae-Jin asked Kim Yu-Sohn.

“Sir. It seems that Miss Yu Baek-Song’s immediate superior is the Minister in Charge of Bureau of Monster Affairs, Kim Hahn-Seol. As he had served as the former Chief of National Police, his martial prowess is considerable, and he also has many personal connections, such as members of Parliament, an executive director in the Dawn Corporation, etc, etc. He is your typical ambitious, driven man.”

“Oh, really?”

Kim Sae-Jin fell into a thought, while scratching his chin.

And exactly ten seconds later, his phone vibrated. He narrowed his brows and checked out who the caller was – it was Jo Hahn-Sung.

“Hello?”

– *“Guild Master, it’s Jo Hahn-Sung. We just received a request for a meeting with a government’s representative over the matter of the Guild registration. And he’s a Minister, as well.”*

“Keheum... Okay, what’s his name?”

Sae-Jin couldn’t help but feel rather emotional at the fact that from being an orphan, he had climbed up in the societal ladder to enjoy a private meeting with a government minister. But such an emotion only lasted for a brief moment.

– *“He’s called Kim Hahn-Seol, the Minister in Charge of Bureau of Monster affairs.”*

“...Oh? Well, I got it. Please inform the other party that I’d like to meet him as soon as possible.”

– *“Yes, sir. I understand.”*

Sae-Jin ended the call.

“What’s the matter, sir?”

Kim Yu-Sohn asked from the side.

“Just now, a reason to meet up with that minister just came around. Looks like... I’ll be able to properly check out what kind of man he is.”

Sae-Jin smiled thickly and replied.



The following day.

As usual, Sae-Jin headed off to the Monster field.

The first thing he did was to change into the Hero Orc Form and went to the village to see what was what. The number of the Orcs living there had increased to three digits, and judging by the fact that the two ‘real’ leader Orc Jaguars had seemingly leveled up to Orc Great Warriors somehow, it was clear there was no longer a need for him to worry about their survival anymore.

Feeling relieved, he then headed towards the upper Mid Tier hunting ground.

He then quickly began searching for Monsters to smash. But during all that, he ended up running into a rather bothersome individual. Actually, he was the one who went to see them first.

It was Kim Yu-Rin.

And she was currently with an unknown man.

From what he could overhear from the distance, this man's name was definitely 'Kim Hahn-Seol'.

Although they were scheduled to meet in three days' time... it wouldn't be so bad to see what this guy's attitude and personality were like beforehand.



## CHAPTER 89

### TRUTH? (3)

---

The man named Kim Hahn-Seol.

His story was like this: three years before graduating from the university, he joined the Special Investigation Division. He was 21. Blessed with a certain Trait, good ability and keen street-smarts, he earned the trust of the then-Chief of the SID and saw a meteoric rise in his career. But in his fifth year with the organization, he was implicated in a rather ugly ‘scandal’ and was fired as a result.

However, for the next two years, he resolved the matter with his own two hands and made a triumphant return to the fold. Then, for the next eight years, he climbed up the ladder within the SID and became its Chief. Even now, well after he had retired from the post, this man still lorded over the National Police Agency as its most powerful figure.

Today was the first time Kim Sae-Jin met this man face to face. Hahn-Seol’s face looked quite young – Sae-Jin had heard that this man’s actual age was in the late 40s but he looked in his early 30s, instead.

‘... His colours aren’t so bad.’

Both the hues of his eyes, and the aura coming off of him didn’t lean particularly towards any side which meant he was ‘neutral’. Quite frankly, Sae-Jin was taken aback by this revelation; after all, he had been under the intense grip of this expectation, where the person responsible for erasing all evidence of his parents’ murders would turn out to be the most dastardly villain out there.

“In any case. I hope you’re carrying out my orders well.”

“Yes, I am. You don’t have to worry.”

Him and Kim Yu-Rin were talking about an unknown topic. Kim Hahn-Seol looked energetic, but she seemed burdened by something weighty.

“Indeed. But there is no need for you to be that diligent. After all, it is...”

Sensing a presence nearby, Hahn-Seol stopped his words and turned towards Sae-Jin's direction. And as soon as confirming that presence was an Orc, he unsheathed a short sword mounted on his hips.

However, Kim Yu-Rin quickly stopped him.

Plus, she was gripping Hahn-Seol's arm strong enough to send him into a bit of panic as well.

"What, what are you doing?" (Kim Hahn-Seol)

"That's the Hero Orc." (Kim Yu-Rin)

"...But that doesn't mean it won't fight humans, correct?"

"Please withdraw your weapon as I'll be the one to resolve this."

Kim Yu-Rin was coldly adamant with her words, and Hahn-Seol had no choice but to do as she said. She then observed the mood of the Orc that simply stood there staring at the two of them, before lightly pushing Kim Hahn-Seol away.

"Excuse me, since we hunted for a while now, how about calling it a day and head home first, alone? It might get a little tougher for you from here onwards. I'll take care of the Orc."

"...Huh? But it's only been 30 minutes. I still have more than enough energy left." (Kim Hahn-Seol)

"No. Please go."

Kim Hahn-Seol was dumbfounded at her sudden stubbornness, but in the end, nodded his head in understanding.

"Well, if you insist that much... But regardless, consider deeply what I've told you before. It's important that you do."

With those parting words, Hahn-Seol left the area. The Orc's eyes chased after the escaping man's back.

"...It's been a while."

After Kim Hahn-Seol had completely left the vicinity, Kim Yu-Rin approached the Orc while her hands were carefully gathered in front of her chest. Seeing this, the Orc fell into a slight dilemma – should he just leave, or ask her what she and Hahn-Seol were talking about?

But to do the latter as an Orc, that made little sense. So, the Orc wordlessly turned around to leave, and that made Yu-Rin to hurriedly reach out and grab hold of his arm.

“W, w, wait... Please stay still for a second. Let’s, let’s talk...”

Unfortunately for her, the Orc didn’t stop moving. And she continued to plead with him, asking him to stop all the while he dragged her around.



Kim Yu-Rin stubbornly followed him around. But she maintained a respectful distance to make sure the Orc wouldn’t feel uncomfortable. When he stopped walking, she stopped too, and when he moved, she did the same.

Maybe it was because she hadn’t seen him in over a month, although she was just following the Orc around without saying a single word, a gentle smile was visible on Kim Yu-Rin’s lips.

But suddenly, the Orc stopped and turned around to look at her. Yu-Rin didn’t panic and met his gaze.

“...Why meet that man?” (Sae-Jin the Orc)

“Ah? Oh, that... it’s because of my work. There really aren’t any other reasons.”

She began to feel happy for some weird reason when the Orc asked her a question.

“No, not that, but what work?” (Sae-Jin the Orc)

But the Orc seemed to unwilling to let go. At this turn of events, Kim Yu-Rin’s head initially tilted to the side, before both the corners of her eyes and lips rose up in a naughty smile.

“Why should I tell you about that? And besides, why would an Orc ask about such a thing?”

She came to stand before the Orc, her hips swaying from side to side. The Orc seemed unhappy at the fact that she was trying to match up to him and his mouth was resolutely closed shut.

“...Can be curious. Orcs, like to know things.” (Sae-Jin the Orc)

“Hmm~. If that’s the case, once every week, would you like to spar with me?”

“...Spar?”

“Yep. It’s not what you think, but simply to improve our abilities at the same time. For you, the leader of the Orc tribe, and for me, a leader who will have to oversee a Knights Order.”

“Then you tell me why?”

Yu-Rin thought about this for a second before energetically nodding her head. Although it was classified information, the jealous (?) Orc in front of her was a Monster, after all.

“Yep!”

“...Fine.”

Since he wanted to strengthen the Orc Form anyways, there was no loss for Sae-Jin either way in this arrangement as well.

“So then, next week... No, I mean, when the sun goes down and comes back up seven times – no, wait, five times, I’ll come see you at your house. Okay?”

“Fine. Then you tell why...”

“I’ll tell you the reason later. After we finish our first sparring together!”

Before he could do anything, Yu-Rin quickly ran away. In her mind, she was thinking of making the Orc sit tight and wait around nervously.

“ ... ”

The Orc simply gazed at her disappearing back with dumbfounded eyes.



After parting ways with Kim Yu-Rin, Sae-Jin returned home only to deal with another visitor.

This time, it was Hazeline. She came to his house while bearing a gift. Her misunderstanding from that event hadn't been cleared yet, and she simply wanted to say thanks for his timely aid – Sae-Jin thought that if he told her the truth, it'd be the same as dragging her into this conflict he had with the Vampires, so in the end, he chose not to clear the air up.

“Mm? You are watching yet another repeat broadcast of yourself on TV?” (Hazeline)

Sitting down on the living room's couch, Hazeline pointed at the TV and spoke. So, Sae-Jin quickly switched the channel.

“...Hah, haha... I don't have any other hobbies beside this one, so...”

“Really? But why did you change the channel? Why don't we watch it together? Isn't it more enjoyable sharing your hobby with someone else?”

Hazeline then snatched away the remote from Sae-Jin's hand and changed the channel again.

– *Mister Kim Sae-Jin, this is not funny anymore, you know? The growth of The Monster is...*

A talk show where the participants were gathered into one location and were told to converse was being broadcast on TV. Originally, one needed to be of an extraordinary background in order to appear alone, but Sae-Jin was doing exactly that, occupying the guest's table all by himself.

“Wow. Mister Sae-Jin seems to have become this generation's top celebrity, no?” (Hazeline)

“...Please stop teasing me.”

“Oops. Busted.”

Initially, she only changed the channel to poke fun at him, but gradually, she too got

absorbed in the show as well.

Sae-Jin's handsome face, now accentuated with makeup, just loved the attention from the overhead spotlights and the cameras. His funny and friendly eloquence was charming as well; also, there were those muscles that peeked out from the gaps of his clothing every now and then, too.

"What the – it's already finished?" (Hazeline)

The final comments from the emcee was coming out of the TV, meaning, she wasn't even aware of the passage of time and had dazedly smiled through the whole show.

"Wow... Mister Sae-Jin, so that's how you became the number one real-time search topic... Now I get it. As expected of a devilishly charming man, someone voted as the number one ideal man by the female Knights."

Hazeline nodded her head in deliberate showing of her understanding.

"A 'number one ideal man'? What on earth is that now?" (Sae-Jin)

"You didn't know? You've been voted as the top pick for the last three months in a row in a famous magazine for Knights."

"...\*cough\*."

Feeling embarrassed somewhat, Sae-Jin scratched the back of his neck while a grin he couldn't disguise broke out on his lips.

"Huhut. You are so adorable. Although, I gotta say, you can feel less happy now since it's the top pick not in the looks department but regarding your abilities. After all, you can find plenty of beautiful male Elf Knights out there." (Hazeline)

"...But, well, I knew that already." (Sae-Jin)

"Hahaht... Is that so? Oh, right. This is a present."

Hazeline giggled at him while her eyes were narrowed to a slit, before pulling out a small package from her bag. While sipping his tea, Sae-Jin accepted it.

"It's an artifact." (Hazeline)

“...An artifact?”

“Yes. And its effect is to strongly suppress sexual desires.”

Sae-Jin came this close to spilling out the tea in his mouth.

“...Cough. But why so out of the blue...?”

“I saw that you’ve been ordering a lot of ingredients required for that lust suppressing potion lately. I thought you were really troubled by the whole thing, though?”

<<<<

Sae-Jin opened the lid on the box. He found a simple-looking artifact styled to look like a bracelet inside.

“Ingesting lots of potions isn’t so good for your body. So, instead, please wear this. Its effect is... well, I’m sure the potions Mister Sae-Jin makes are superior, but still.”

She personally fitted the bracelet on Sae-Jin’s wrist. Its colour resembled Hazeline’s skin tone – pure white.

“...Will this thing take care of my... problem?”

“To a point. But that doesn’t mean I’ll be the one to take care of the rest, you know?”

Hazeline passed off an odd joke to him.

However, now that he had evolved into the Lycanthrope, even a passing mention was enough to give Sae-Jin a huge stimulus. His body trembled noticeably for a moment or two before he let out a deliberately relaxed smile and shook his head.

“...Ha, hahah... Thank you for your help.”

“Don’t mention it. I’ve received a lot more from you, after all.”

Hazeline laughed genially and got up from her seat.

“Well then, I should get going now~.”

“Oh, right. Take care.”

Sae-Jin got up as well to see her to the door.

“I’ll talk to you later.”

Putting her high heels back on, Hazeline lightly tapped on his broad shoulders and left through the front door. Sae-Jin was smiling in satisfaction as he watched her back.

As expected, even her posterior was as eye-catching as her front...

*\*SFX for a mobile phone vibrating\**

Right on cue, his phone began vibrating. Yu Sae-Jung had sent him a message.

“...”

The contents of her message were so affectionate that it ended up making Sae-Jin feel guilty for some unfathomable reason.



During the night with a full moon brightening the sky.

The Lycanthrope’s instincts proved to be incredibly difficult to contain. Doubts of him being no longer a human visited him in the middle of several nights as well.

Every time that happened, his rage surged and he just couldn’t remain still. So, he began roaming around outside.

Changing into the appearance of the ‘Wolf’, he jumped across the rooftops of tall skyscrapers while bathed in the moonlight. The leg strength of this Wolf form was so great that he could easily leap over a ten-story building with single jump. And during his speedy dash across the skyline while being bombarded by the harsh night air streaming past his skin – his blues seemed to dissipate, at least for a bit.

Most likely, he’d not remember what he was doing right now, come the following morning.

But it did not matter at all in this moment.



“...Fuu-ah.”

Before he knew it, Sae-Jin found himself arriving on top of a very tall building. As he stood there, drinking the cold air in this high place, some of his burning instincts had cooled down somewhat.

“...Where is this place?”

While scratching the top of his head with the claws that were harder than mithril, Sae-Jin walked towards the roof railings. When he looked over, he could see nothing but deep darkness by the empty road way, way down below. However, the silver streaks from the neon-lit letters still managed to pierce the gloomy darkness.

*‘Romance of Dawn.’*

This was the hotel where the Bathorys were staying currently. Sae-Jin momentarily freaked out. Did he subconsciously utilise the information gained while he was conscious?

But there wasn’t enough time for him to leisurely figure this out. After all, he had sensed several presences just beyond the metal access door to the roof.

He was about to quickly get the hell out of there, but then, Sae-Jin stopped moving.

There were at least ten of them behind the door, but well, none of them were strong enough to truly cause him any meaningful issues.

‘... I can use Dark Energy Link here.’

He stared at the metal door while thinking about the available Skill sets he could use. If he just captured one of them alive, couldn’t he be able to extract valuable information on these Vampire bastards?

*Kkahwahng!!*

The metal door to the roof flung open with a loud bang.

“...What the?!”

Ten ‘henchmen’ hurriedly checked the situation on the roof to find the unknown

creature that had allegedly breached the barrier.

“...Maybe it was a bird or something?”

When one of the henchmen spoke to an ‘Apostle’ of his suspicion, the moonlight brightening the area suddenly wavered.

It was as if the moon itself was trying to illuminate the hidden figure...

“Who goes there!!”

The Apostle shouted out. And at the same time, terrifying claws cut through one of the goons while drawing eerie lines in the air. It was just one attack, but then, those claws flowed around like as if they were being pulled along by chains and locked onto another Vampire nearby.

“Kkeuahahahkk!!”

“Euahahk!!”

In the blink of an eye, nine screams soared high into the sky.

Watching all of his subordinates perish, the Apostle panicked and opened his eyes ultra-wide.

And finally, he spotted a certain creature standing there, reflecting the moonlight.

“Hiya.”

A pair of silver eyes, and the wild mane that was the same colour as the moon; the protruding maws of a beast and incomparably sharp, piercing eyeline; and that smooth and supple fur – this beast that could talk, it could only be...

“...”

This appearance was the most terrifying thing this Vampire had seen. In the end, he fainted where he stood while showing the whites of his eyes and bubbles foaming out of his mouth.

# CHAPTER 90

## TRUTH? (4)

---

The ranks of Vampires were divided into six.

From: slave → commoner → henchman → Believer → Apostle → and finally, the Elder.

And to clarify further, the rank of slaves wasn't filled by Vampires. This was the class consisting of those non-Vampire races under the spell of 'charm' magic. In other words, they were literally slaves under the beck and call of the Vampires.

On the other hand, a Vampire had to be at least of the rank of 'foot soldier/henchman' in order to be treated as a real fighting force; the ones in this rank possessed combat prowess equal to that of low Mid to Mid Tier Knights or C~D ranked Wizards.

From here onwards, every elevation in rank corresponded with the hike in power equal to that of Knight's Tiers. So, at the level of an 'Apostle', it was at least around the mid High Tier Knights or the Wizards with rankings around A-.

However – if one was only strong at performing magic but not so much in physical abilities, then that person was as good as a sitting duck for the Lycanthrope. That was the case with the 'Apostle' Sae-Jin had captured alive just now, when this guy was compared to the other Apostles that attacked him and Hazeline a few days ago.

The name of this poor Apostle he caught was 'Rhosrahdell'. (TL: 로스라델) *As he was still too young, the powers of his bloodline hadn't fully manifested yet, and thus his strength was no better than that of a 'Believer'.*

"...It's the truth!!" (Rhosradell)

At least, according to his own mouth, that was.

"Well then, is that all the info you know?" (Sae-Jin the Lycan)

"Yes, yes!! Besides the stuff already revealed to the world, and the fact that Bathory is jumping around in anger, that's all I know, I swear- Ahhaaaahark!! Euahahaaark!! Ahhhakk!!"

The ever-so talkative Apostle began screaming his head off utterly frightened as soon as Sae-Jin pressed his face closer. This reaction was quite funny, so Sae-Jin let out a light chuckle that sounded like a threatening growl.

“Kkhek, kkeeeeeeececk...”

Because of that, though, foams bubbled up from the corners of the Vampire’s mouth as if he was about to faint again.

Sae-Jin was a bit miffed about this, thinking, ‘Is the Wolf’s appearance that scary? I thought I looked pretty good, especially among other Wolves... ’

“Hmm...”

Stepping back, Sae-Jin lightly scratched the fur on his chest with his claws while falling into a deep thought. He had already finished establishing the Dark Energy Link between himself and this Vampire. Since all his Skills increased in Proficiency Levels after his evolution to the Lycanthrope, if he went around this smartly, couldn’t he be able to insert a mole within the Vampires’ ranks?

“Oh, yeah. Isn’t it possible to identify those ‘slaves’, normal people under the charm magic or whatever?” (Sae-Jin the Lycan)

He thought of this just now. This was the one of the main reasons why Vampires could exert enormous influence in the world, despite their numbers being low. Although this terrified guy did tell him that a full fledged Apostle could control up to five ‘slaves with will’, he still hadn’t mentioned how big the scale of this whole thing was yet.

“H, huh? I, I don’t know yet, who controls which slave. I haven’t talked to many other Apostles because I’m still too young!”

“You don’t even know your own slaves?”

“No!! Nononono. Of course I know who they are. I can tell you all you want to know, of course!”

Was it because this fool was still immature? His somewhat “honest” attitude even took Sae-Jin aback greatly. It was as if there was no need to even do the whole Dark Energy Link thing at all.

“There are only three people under me. An entertainer named Oh Yeon-Hui, an assistant prosecutor for the Seoul Metropolitan Area, Kim Soo-Ho, and finally, Yuk Soh-Hahn, a recently elected member of the National Assembly.”

But when this Apostle told him of the type of people that was under his charm spell, Sae-Jin couldn't help but be astonished. To think that someone like Oh Yeon-Hui, who was considered as the top actress in South Korea was a 'slave' – not to mention, a prosecutor who was in direct contact with the centres of political power, as well as a member of the National Assembly, too...

Didn't this mean, Sae-Jin now had influence on those three, too? At this unexpected bonus, Sae-Jin's lips quivered in happiness.

“Keuhm. You only use big shots like them as slaves?”

“Oh, no, no, no. My luck was on the better side. I charmed them before they became famous and then I quietly supported them within my means. They climbed up to where they are by their own hands.”

That was quite an acceptable answer.

“How interesting. However... since I got what I wanted, you no longer have any uses for me.” (Sae-Jin the Lycanthrope)

Sae-Jin deliberately made an eerie smile and opened his palm wide. His hand, which was twice the size of the Vampire's head, drew a threatening shadow across the walls.

“Noooo!! Eu, euhaaaaahk!! P, please, waaaaaaiiit!!”

The young Apostle's body writhed around while crying like a baby. At the same time, he began hurling insults towards his useless 'colleagues' with a high-pitched voice that might split apart in a moment or two. Trashy henchmen, Apostles and Believers that were good for nothing, and finally, even his owners, the Bathorys.

How pathetic and desperate he must have been.

“...Oi.”

Sae-Jin grabbed the Apostle's face and spoke. Since his mouth was covered by that huge hand, all he could do was to nod his head urgently.

“Wanna live?”

“Heu-beubeubeup!!”

Showing how much he wanted to carry on living, this Vampire even began licking Sae-Jin’s palm.

“Oho, really?”

Looking down on this desperately pathetic weakling, Sae-Jin’s lips twisted in an evil smile.



Five days later, the promised day with Kim Yu-Rin.

Sae-Jin waited for her to arrive in front of the Orc village and when she showed up like clockwork, he quickly changed into the Hero Orc and received her.

It seemed like Yu-Rin wanted to genuinely converse with him, judging by how much she was yapping on and on, but the ‘Hero Orc’ simply headed straight for the sparring arena. Although it was nominally a sparring arena, it was nothing more than some piece of land made up of rocks and earth for wrestling matches.

However, the actual sparring easily transcended the shabbiness of the arena with its ferociousness that matched up to a real battle.

The destructive mace attack that crushed the atmosphere itself, as well as the sword aura that cleanly carved through the air.

*Kwaaahang!!*

Humongous explosions of sounds reverberated around as if there was a mountain slide happening somewhere every time two weapons collided, with each one representing different combat style but ultimately, displaying similar levels of destructive power.

But in all honestly, Kim Yu-Rin wasn’t going all out. Of course, with the exception of her Trait, she was using all of her physical prowess, but her true power lay with that Trait of hers.

For Sae-Jin in his Hero Orc Form, though – he was actually giving it 100%. He didn't activate the Warrior of Reversal, but as the spar progressed, his reasoning gradually faded away.

And in the end, watching her deftly deflect his attacks repeatedly and try to land in counters made him furious beyond words and he activated the Warrior of Reversal.

As one would expect, the atmosphere changed rapidly as reddish aura oozed out from the Orc's body.

“Kkeuck...!”

Unfortunately for him, her confused state lasted only for a blink. She struggled to deflect the mace powerfully smashing down on her, and then quickly dashed in closer to the Orc before hitting him on the arm with her Trait, ‘Desideratum’ active.

*Thak.*

To him, it felt like a small pebble lightly tapping on his skin. Quickly dismissing it as nothing important, the Orc tried to shove her away into the distance with a shoulder tackle.

“...!!”

However, as if he was glued to the ground, his feet wouldn't budge. Only then did his hotheadedness cool down a bit, realising what just had happened here.

‘She assigned *purpose* into her sword.’

The reason why she could become the youngest-ever Highest Tier Knight, even if her Trait was not a growth-type.

She had used her Trait, in the end.

“Since you used a Skill first, I'm just returning the favour, right?”

Yu-Rin looked at the struggling Orc as if he was the cutest thing and then lightly tapped him in the head with her sword.

“It's my victory.” (Yu-Rin)

‘But you cheated!!’ (Sae-Jin)

He was getting angrier the more he stared at Yu-Rin’s beaming smile that showed how assured she was of her victory, which made him struggle even harder instead.

As long as he was the Orc, there was nothing much he could do against its nature. He knew well enough he shouldn’t struggle so much, yet he tried to free his feet nonstop.

Muscles all over his body bulged like balloons ready to pop and blood vessels protruded visibly on his face.

“You should just give up now. The restraints won’t be undone so easily since I spent quite a lot of Mana so...”

But she did not count on the Orc’s persistence perfectly lining up with the ‘System’ itself.

[The host tried desperately to win against the mysterious power of the world.]  
[That persistence has resulted in acquisition of the Passive Skill, ‘Partial Resistance’.] [The new Passive Skill reacts positively with the following: race ‘Lycanthrope’, property ‘Mana Body’, and race-unique Skill ‘Divinity’ of the Leviathan Form.] [The Passive Skill ‘Partial Resistance’ has been converted to: ‘Resistance’.]

[Resistance] [Proficiency Level: F-]

– The power that can interfere with the natural phenomena that is the foundation of the world, as well as able to resist the Concept and the Principle.

For a Skill acquired during a spar, there seemed to be lots of words popping up into his view. However, the Orc hurriedly dismissed those trivial matters and forcefully squeezed out every little drop of strength from this entire body.

And then – with sound of dirt falling off, his foot began to lift off the ground for real.

At that moment, Yu-Rin’s face was dyed in the deep hues of utter shock.



However...

“...\*Groan\*”

As expected, it was still impossible to break free out of her restraints with only an F-Skill. The Orc faltered grandly in total exhaustion and even ended up dropping his mace.

The Orc became furious at the fact that his final struggle was all for naught, and at the same time, Yu-Rin was wordlessly swallowing down her saliva.

That was an event she had never experienced before. And so, she failed to understand what just happened there. Sure, there were times when she didn't have enough Mana, but when her Trait did activate, it would always work for her no matter what.

“Kheuarhak!”

While she was lost in her thoughts, the Orc began throwing tantrums as if to say having his legs restrained was getting rather irritating. She only then recovered her wandering mind and tried to pacify the Orc.

“Please wait for two more minutes. That restraint is supposed to last for three, you see.”



It was now the break time after the sparring had ended.

<<<<

The Orc walked towards Kim Yu-Rin who was busy wiping the sweat off her forehead, and handed her a wooden container with spring water in it.

“Oh. Thank you so much.”

Yu-Rin smiled brightly and thanked him but Sae-Jin lightly dismissed that while plopping down on the ground to recheck the details of the Skill he had acquired.

[Resistance] [Proficiency Level: F-]

– The power that can interfere with the natural phenomena that is the foundation of the world, as well as able to resist the Concept and the Principle.

Both its name and the description sounded simple and ambiguous at the same time, but the longer he thought about it, it became clearer just how much potential there was with this Skill.

Able to interfere with the natural phenomena that was the foundation of the world, as well as the ‘Concept’ and the ‘Principle’.

From those words, what Sae-Jin could come up with was – the Concept of Space, and the Principle of Time.

The actual possibility of this Skill allowing him to distort Space and reverse the flow of Time was pretty low. Especially considering that he earned this Skill during sparring, so understandably, his faith in it took a big hit.

But then again, there was this one thing that overwhelmingly restored his faith in this Skill, somewhat:

[Skill Proficiency: 0.000%]

It was the amount shown on his Proficiency window. It was even lower than three decimal points, and he had to really concentrate to see the actual figure of [0.00075%]. If it was like this, then wouldn’t that mean a lifetime of hard work might just get him to around the level of D~E at most...?

“You are not curious anymore?”

As he was submerged in these tough thoughts, she suddenly began talking to him. She was staring at the Orc who seemed to have zero interest in her with a pout.

“What... oh. Right.”

The reason why she met with Kim Hahn-Seol. The Orc nodded his head and asked her about it.

“You don’t seem to be curious about it anymore... but well, a promise is a promise, so...”

Yu-Rin let out a fake cough and continued.

“It’s simply a favour from him, asking me to investigate and compile a report on a certain man. One of my subordinates happens to be close to him. I don’t like doing it, though, since it feels like I’m snooping around behind that person’s back.”

She then subtly studied the Orc’s reactions. His facial expression remained the same as before: fearsome.

“...Investigate?”

“Oh, that. Uhm, explaining that is a bit... complicated, so, uh... You see, we’re affiliated with the government of... No, wait. I have a boss, you see. And this boss wants a detailed report on some other people. The reason for that is to... uh, make governance easier... well, honestly, even I don’t know the real reason. I’m just doing it as I’ve been ordered to. If I don’t, then it’ll be troublesome for my Order.”

Now that he’d heard it, the matter wasn’t so important after all. Now that his misunderstanding over how serious the matter was resolved, all tension left his body and so, the Orc let out a mighty yawn.

“Ahahahahat... What is this? Even Orcs yawn?”

Kim Yu-Rin burst into a child-like laughter after seeing the Orc’s ill timed yawn.



The favour Kim Hahn-Seol asked Yu-Rin was nothing more than a pretext, and the truth of his intentions was revealed after a week had passed by.

He was a member of the Society, ‘Trilogy’. Not only that, he was its founding member, to boot – although ever since he became a government minister, he had left the Society, at least on the surface. It was Trilogy that resolved the disgraceful scandal he was suffering from in the past.

“We have detected a plot led by Kim Hahn-Seol to implicate you, the Guild Master. But the matter is quite complicated and it seems that we won’t be able to prevent the news from breaking out.” (Kim Yu-Sohn)

One could say that this attempt to suppress him wasn’t just from Kim Hahn-Seol alone but from a certain ‘Guild’ as well. Or possibly, a scheme of someone hidden within that Guild, who was from the ‘questionable’ species.

Sae-Jin was sure of the latter option being true. It was only two weeks ago that Vampires tried to ambush him, after all. It was way too close a time frame to call it a coincidence.

But whatever the case may have been, Sae-Jin was still under the danger of being framed. As for his crimes... he wasn’t 100% sure what, but it seemed to be related to taxes.

“So, what’s his beef with me?” (Sae-Jin)

“It seems that Kim Hahn-Seol is going to use the Orc Blacksmith’s income tax rates. Until now, the Orc Blacksmith maintained anonymity and used us here in the Society to do business. The problem rises from the fact that the Society’s income tax rates and that of the Blacksmith’s preferential income tax rates are clearly different, to begin with.”

It was true – Sae-Jin did hear that the tax rates for Blacksmiths were lower, in order to ‘encourage’ more to join the profession.

“Right now, we’ve been applying the Society’s tax rates. But before the Society grew to its current size, we calculated taxes of all proceeds from the sales of the Orc’s wares according to the Blacksmith’s preferential rates and the rest were deposited into the bank account opened under the Society Chairman’s name. That is the most worrisome point at the moment.”

Sae-Jin was developing a migraine just listening to this. But being dragged through mud was irritating to him even more. The race of Lycanthropes could not stand being on the receiving end. Honestly, even Sae-Jin was getting really furious right now.

“...What can we do about it?”

“That is... I apologise, but we can’t think of a response for this. Even if we forego this

Blacksmith's preferential tax rates and pay up the shortfall, that in turn will be seen as a tacit admittance of your guilt... Plus, with the announcement date for the successful Guild promotion being only a month away, whatever we decide to respond with, it will end up negative for us, sir." (Kim Yu-Sohn)

It seemed that the 1st place holder became a bunch of dirty cowards the moment 2nd place closed in. Sae-Jin clenched his fists tightly. His knuckles cracked loudly.

Of course, there was one way he could think of, that would potentially resolve this issue. Most likely, Kim Yu-Sohn also must have thought about it as well. Only that, as Sae-Jin was rather sensitive towards this topic, the veteran Mercenary hadn't mentioned it yet in consideration.

"...Looks like it can't be helped, then. If the news breaks, then I'll reveal that I'm the Orc Blacksmith. However – if it can be blocked somehow, please give it your all."

"I'll do my best."

"Fuu... Yes. By the way, there is something else."

Sae-Jin let out a sigh. His heated breath was full of his boiling rage.

At first, he wanted to use the moderate way. Rather than dragging Kim Hahn-Seol down, he'd rather choose to forcefully push Yu Baek-Song up instead. But now...

"Let's do our own background investigation now. Not only Kim Hahn-Seol, but several of his backers as well – it's time for payback."

The 'Intelligence Agency' that was established within the shadows of the Monster Mercenary Company now boasted over 130 agents. Most of them happened to be Cat-type Soo-ins, and according to Kim Yu-Sohn, there were three of them that were good enough to be inserted into a complicated information warfare.

Obviously, it'd be too much to expect these agents to uncover top secret information erased from the records by the leaders of the current administration, but conversely, finding out about faults of a handful of people would be easier than snatching candy from a baby. And as long as those faults were uncovered, the public and the media will do the follow-up and bury them alive.

Rather obviously, the media people would choose to side with the stronger party so

the whole affair might become a battle between the behind-the-scenes backers. But it'd never be a war.

They would never be able to figure out who was attacking Kim Hahn-Seol. And, what would happen under the situation where Kim Hahn-Seol's substitute was already set in stone, someone who could swear her loyalty and obedience, on the surface at least, and also possessing twice the ability? Namely, Yu Baek-Song?

Which choice would *they* make? Whether to hold onto a walking political liability with heavy losses stacked against him, or to kick him to the curb and embrace a cleanly polished and beautiful pearl, instead?

It was painfully obvious.

Kim Sae-Jin couldn't wait to meet Kim Hahn-Seol two days from now.

# CHAPTER 91

## TRUTH? (5)

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“You are not doing it, for real? But you’ve been appearing on TV shows a lot lately... why only not this one? This one’s recording time is also short, too...” (Yu Sae-Jung)

A certain Summer afternoon.

As Sae-Jin was under strain from his complicated problem, Yu Sae-Jung came around holding a script from a TV talk show and started whining on and on.

“Plus, you’d be appearing together with me...” (Yu Sae-Jung)

The culprit was the sudden invitation coming from the so-called couple’s talk show.

“It should be nice for both of us, you know? That’s because...”

“Sae-Jung.”

Unable to endure anymore, Sae-Jin finally called out to her in a low voice.

“Mm, hmm?”

Yu Sae-Jung’s body trembled for a second, then. Not even looking at her, Sae-Jin sighed out grandly while massaging his temples.

“...Let’s, let’s talk about it later. I’m really busy right now.” (Sae-Jin)

“With what...”

*...With what work?*

However, Yu Sae-Jung couldn’t finish her question. His facial expression and his current body language showed how truly bothered he was by her presence here.

She could only gaze at him with her lips tightly shut. He looked so cold and indifferent right now, concentrating on those documents in his hands.

It wasn't only this time, either. She could feel it on her skin, how much he was bothered by her. Even though Sae-Jin had denied it, without a doubt, he had changed.

"...Then, I should get going."

However, she just could not say anything resentful towards him. She knew all too well who held all the answers in this relationship, after all.

Suddenly, she felt regret. Back then, back when Sae-Jin couldn't suppress his desires anymore – she should have just let him embrace her...

Feeling remorseful, Yu Sae-Jung grasped the door handle.

"Wait."

She heard Sae-Jin from her back. Her heavy emotions reverted back ever-so-subtly, and the strength gripping the door handle automatically left her, just like that.

"...Sae-Jung."

Whenever she heard her name being spoken out from his lips, she felt herself flutter. Sae-Jung turned around, her face slightly reddened.

"There's something I'd like to talk to you about."

"..."

However, at his follow-up words, her face hardened slightly, instead.

He wanted to talk to her. Kim Sae-Jin often beat around the bush like this, whenever he needed the Dawn's aid in something.

"What is it? I... always welcome it."

But for her, even being used by him was okay. Because that meant he needed her. Didn't that mean there was a chance of things developing further? All she had to do was to work harder to develop the relationship, right?

"Please, come sit in front of me for a while."



Kim Sae-Jin smiled deeply and pointed at the chair in front.



Several quiet days passed by, as if they were proverbial calm before the incoming storm.

Yu Sae-Jung said that she'd do what she could, but she also cautioned him it would not be easy, either. After all, the moment the Dawn gets involved, then its rival corporations would probably jump into the fray as well.

In other words, it was not possible to prevent the news from breaking out.

And so, while he was mired in many different things, the Goblin village was continuing to grow from strength to strength. Now, it was big enough to be called an underground town.

"...That is some sight to behold, isn't it?"

Kim Sae-Jin broke out in a hollow chuckle, while looking at Goblins playing the sport of *jokgu* with their short legs and small bodies. These creatures were spending the sweet downtime earned after eight hours of labour exactly like humans would. *(TL: Jokgu is a Korean team sport which combines aspects of 'association football' and 'volleyball'. Google it if you're curious.)*

Checking them out every now and then, Sae-Jin thought their actions were rather adorable, somehow. Such as, one Goblin who had failed to receive the ball was scratching the back of its neck while looking embarrassed.

...In all honesty, Sae-Jin wasn't expecting to find more about the fact that Goblins possessed the highest IQ and EQ among all the Monsters out there like this.

"I taught them the sport. I thought it was a pity that their current living pattern only consisted of eating and sleeping." (Kim Yu-Sohn)

"It's a good idea. Seeing how fat those potion-making Goblins are now, looks like things are going well that side – but, what about the Witchcraft Goblins, though?"

The potential usages of the Witchcraft Goblins were truly enormous. Those Witchcraft techniques that were already known to the rest of the world, including the likes of

‘restraints,’ ‘detection,’ ‘protection,’ etc, etc, they were pretty much the same as very useful magic spells.

Also, it was possible to transfer knowledge via blood thanks to Goblin’s species-specific Trait. In other words, all those techniques created by the Witchcraft Goblins would become his, pretty soon.

“Well, they are doing their best, but... the results aren’t too encouraging at this point in time. It seems that the absence of a leader figure is playing a role here.”

“Is that so?”

Well, even the so-called transferring of knowledge was actually the Chieftain passing it onto a subordinate Witchcraft Goblin, after all.

Just as Sae-Jin was about to lick his lips in regret, both his and Yu-Sohn’s phones began ringing at the same time.

That sure was ominous. Two of them stared at each other briefly, before rushing towards the surface.



*– The crime of tax evasion by The Monster’s Chairman, Kim Sae-Jin has now been uncovered. The amount is \$46 million USD, proceeds from the sales of weapons...*

The day before the scheduled meeting with the minister, the news finally broke. As expected, it had to do with his tax.

As if everything was arranged ahead of time, the news spread around rapidly, and the meeting with the minister was duly cancelled – leading to this second news item, which went like, ‘Kim Sae-Jin insults a government minister’ or some such.

‘So, he wasn’t even planning to meet in the first place, huh.’

Also, he now understood why Kim Hahn-Seol asked Kim Yu-Rin to investigate him.

[Meanwhile, the Special Investigation Division received reports from the National Tax Service and members of The Monster...]

Above was a single excerpt from the article that occupied the upper sections of the portal site search results.

This one sentence had an enormous ripple impact on the public.

Of course, although it seemingly had nothing to do with his tax problem, it was not a lie that someone did make a report. So, even if Kim Yu-Rin and Yi Hye-Rin tried to clear up the air belatedly, all the news publication had to say was, 'reporters made a mistake while rushing the story out'.

If Kim Sae-Jin didn't know what was actually going on, then his Society members would end up being alienated from one another here.

Just like now.

"...I, I didn't say anything slanderous to anyone... I'm, I'm telling the truth!!" (Yi Hye-Rin)

Yi Hye-Rin trembled heavily as she entered Sae-Jin's office. He also heard that Kim Yu-Rin was hurriedly making her way towards the HQ at the moment as well.

"Only thing I reported on was what I saw you, the Chairman's, daily routines, and I've never even mentioned anything related to t, tax matters..." (Yi Hye-Rin)

"I know."

It was his first time seeing her this unsettled and fearful, so Sae-Jin gently tapped her on the shoulder to calm her down.

"I already know that this event is some bastards scheming to screw me over, so please, do not worry. I've already begun searching for the ones behind this plot."

He had already sent the 'Linked-up' Apostle Rhosradel into the ranks of Vampires, while his agents were working tirelessly to gather more than enough dirt on Kim Hahn-Seol and his backers to bury them away.

So, it was only a matter of time before the backlash slaps them in the face.

"If, if that's the case, then... Ah!! Miss Kim Yu-Rin is not that kind of person either."

“I also know that, very well.”

When he asked Yu-Rin as the Hero Orc just before this incident broke out, she said, “I should do this instead of someone else, so there won’t be any distortion of facts”. That showed that she believed in him. It was that, she too had become a victim simply by following the order to the letter.

“If it’s not explained away properly, there might be a big blow to our public image.”

Kim Sae-Jin formed a smile deliberately. Whether it was truth or not, matters related to taxes were a sensitive topic to the public at large.

Plus, the situation was now at the point where several news articles were writing utter garbage, that he was exploiting the Orc Blacksmith...

“Miss Kim Yu-Rin has arrived.”

Jo Hahn-Sung quickly informed Sae-Jin.



As soon as Kim Yu-Rin arrived, every member of the Society as well as its ‘think tank’ gathered and began discussing emergency countermeasures. But, it was just impossible to refute every accusation thrown at their way.

During the time he lived the double life as the Human Kim Sae-Jin and the Orc Blacksmith, he wasn’t meticulous with keeping his secrets all the time. There were times when he didn’t pay attention, such as when his Society was at its infancy, and these bastards were exploiting this.

And now, some employees present during this meeting, who had no clue that Sae-Jin was the Orc Blacksmith, ended up saying that although this whole thing was a mistake, a few parts here and there did sound like tax evasion to them.

Also, only after three hours passed since the ‘breaking’ of the news, the media did something they were well known to do every now and then; they assumed that he did defraud on his tax and began reporting as such. Seeing the number of comments shoot past twenty thousand, Sae-Jin again realised the importance of his Society, The Monster, in this world.

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Whatever the case may have been, with the current situation as it was, even if they demand a retraction from the media outlets, that would take a figurative forever to happen. In the meantime, the public images of Sae-Jin and his Society would hit rock bottom. That was why, there was only one method that could solve this chaos and reverse those negative media perception and their articles.

It was to reveal that Sae-Jin was the Orc Blacksmith.

The sole reason why he maintained the double identity was to preemptively prevent unnecessary rumours and questions from potentially spreading around. After all, the method 'the ORK' utilised in crafting weapons wasn't something he could reveal to the public, thanks to how different it was compared to other blacksmiths.

And now that things had devolved this far, his reasoning had become somewhat pointless.

The moment he comes clean, there was a chance that the media and the public would become incredibly curious as to just what kind of Trait Sae-Jin had. Surely, there would be those who would outright ask him about it, too.

...And then, he also kind of felt embarrassed about this as well. Although he had no choice but to keep his circumstances as a secret, others might think of him being impertinent and arrogant in playing a game of deception like this.

"For now, I've clarified my position, saying that there was no such thing in my report... But the chaos has grown so big already and... I won't offer you any excuses. I'm truly sorry." (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin lowered her head in a distressed expression. Whether it was because of the order from above or not, it was true that she did investigate his background, after all.

"It's fine. It's fine so please, don't beat yourself up with this. For now..."

There wasn't much choice left. His head hurt way too much for a meeting like this one, and he even felt irritation bubbling up at all those reports and comments appearing in real time as well.

“Please call for a press conference.” (Sae-Jin)



On a clear afternoon.

Countless reporters, cameras and news vans from TV stations crowded on a garden located within The Monster’s grounds, designated as the spot for the press conference.

As an aside, this conference was being broadcast live to the rest of the country as well.

“...Did he really defraud on his tax?” (Unknown reporter 1)

“Since this whole thing is complicated, it does sound questionable, but I think he did it. But more than that, I’m more curious about the relationship between the Orc Blacksmith and Kim Sae-Jin.” (Unknown reporter 2)

“Yeah, me too. Just what made the Orc use someone like Kim Sae-Jin as his intermediary? To the point where he poured all his earnings to the Society, even?” (Unknown reporter 1)

“I don’t know. I mean, we know there is this Orc Blacksmith, but we don’t have any concrete details about him, right? That preferential tax thing was awarded solely because of his participation in the Blacksmith Open tournament, no? So, well, there are lots of whisperings that they are actually half brothers, or that the Orc is a slave, that he’s from different species, etc, etc... But since he said all will be revealed today, let’s take a proper look, shall we?” (Unknown reporter 2)

Reporters were busy chatting away among themselves, their conversations full of curiosity.

While they were occupied like so, two female Knights from the Raven Order made their appearance – the two who were suspected to be the ones who have made those so-called reports.

Camera flashes went off like crazy and questions were thrown at their way, but the two simply said, “we’ve already clarified our positions so go and print retractions first” and headed to the empty seats out in the front row prepared for them.

And so, another twenty minutes went by, with only five more remaining before the

press conference was scheduled to commence.

The tension ran quite high; reporters and camera crews waited with bated breaths for the arrival of Kim Sae-Jin to the stage.

“He’s coming!”

Set off by an unknown person’s shout, camera flashes went off once more, and all of the cameras focused on one place. Kim Sae-Jin, decked out in a formal business suit, walked like a cool supermodel.

Carrying a stiff face, he stood on the prepared stage. And then, after letting out a single fake cough, he said...

“Tax evasion. Although there have been some misunderstandings here, it is categorically untrue.”

That was his opening line.

Right away, camera flashes exploded and questions that sounded like roars of wild animals spread around.

“What is your reasoning for that?”

“But the National Tax Agency is certain of...”

“There are rumours that you listed the Dawn’s aid to squash this allegation altogether. Do you not feel any guilt on your conscience?”

There could not be anything more torturous than this on his auditory and visual senses that were so much sharper after his evolution to the Lycanthrope.

“Please, calm down first...”

Sae-Jin closed his eyes and gestured the reporters to slow down first. And then, he quickly seized the small gap between the frenzy of the reporters to continue with his words.

“A lot of people are curious about the Orc Blacksmith’s identity.”

He produced a document from the bag carried on his side.

This was the relic of the past when the Orc Blacksmith first made his debut – the application form for the Blacksmith Open Tournament that was returned to him as the proof of his participation. Although there were no fingerprints on it, there were a signature and the return address written on it.

“This is the application form from the time when the Orc applied to participate in the Open Tournament. At the time, when the Orc was guarding his identity even more fiercely compared to today, the address written on it shows the post office in Gangwon Province.”

Ignoring the continuously exploding camera flashes, he then lifted up the scanned paper that detailed the beginning of all the transactions taken place so far.

“You’ll see that the Orc had never used his own name. Everything was done with me, Kim Sae-Jin, as the proxy. Since the complication with the preferential tax arises from this, I’m guessing the main issue is with this part, yes?

“Also, I see that there is another point that has caused a great deal of confusion, that has led to you raising many questions regarding the matter. Why would the Orc Blacksmith use me, Kim Sae-Jin, as a proxy, someone who is an orphan and has not much of a background? Is he really a slave that simply hands over all of his creations?”

Sae-Jin let out a lengthy sigh.

“To be clear, he’s not a slave, nor did he appoint me as his proxy.”

Reporters only then began remembering that unrealistic story in their heads. That urban legend of Kim Sae-Jin being one and the same as the Orc Blacksmith.

All of them believed that, although sounding feasible, that story was simply nonsensical. No, it was an impossibility. In order to produce weapons of the Orc’s calibre, it just wasn’t enough to dedicate oneself on walking down the lonely path of the blacksmiths.

“Let me clarify further.”

Sae-Jin breathed in deeply and surveyed the surroundings. He saw the faces of the deeply shocked people. Among them included Kim Yu-Rin, Yi Hye-Rin and Joo Ji-Hyuk.



It was understandable, really, since Sae-Jin hadn't told them the truth until now.

"I am the Orc Blacksmith."

He thought there would be explosions of flashes. However, everything was quiet.

These reporters had no room left to start snapping his pictures, after all.



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